

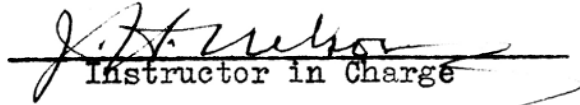
The Love of the Soil as a Motivating Force in
Literature Relating to the Early Development of the
Middle West


by

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Submitted to the Department
of English
and the Faculty of the
Graduate School of the Univer-
sity of Kansas in partial
fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts.

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TO MY HUSBAND
WILHELMINE E. HENDERSON
A LOVER OF THE SOIL
WHOSE GENEROUS INTEREST
HAS MADE THIS STUDY POSSIBLE

Acknowledgments

Many people have helped, directly or indirectly, in the preparation of the following thesis. The writer mentions with especial appreciation the assistance of Dr. J.H. Nelson of the University of Kansas in the selection and organization of the material presented. Thanks are also due to Professor R.D. O'Leary and other members of the English Department for valuable criticisms and suggestions. Mr. Elmer T. Peterson of Des Moines, Iowa gave friendly encouragement to the work. Recognition is gratefully made of the courteous and efficient help of the library assistants of the Watson and Carnegie libraries of Lawrence, Kansas, and of the Public Library at Kansas City, Missouri. The writer's daughter, Eleanor Henderson, gave indispensable help in the final preparation of the manuscript.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. Introduction	1
II. Biographical Preparation of the Selected Writers for Their Portrayal of Pioneer Life	17
III. Love of the Soil as a Motive for Western Settlement	34
IV. Characteristic Features in a Composite Portrait of a True Lover of the Soil	51
V. Obstacles in the Course of Lovers of the Soil	59
VI. Compensations	86
VII. Special Recognition of the Con- tributions of Women to the Conquest of the Frontier	96
VIII. Conclusion	103

CHAPTER I

Introduction

In a lonely valley of southeastern Colorado, near the junction of West Carrizo Creek with its northern branch, one may yet discover faint traces of one of the lost towns of an earlier day. A broken ridge of Dakota sandstone curving around on the northwest rises high above the shelf-like terrace once occupied by the little settlement. One may fancy that this rocky barrier served as a partial defence against the fierce winds and furious winter storms of that desolate region. A single street may still be traced for forty or fifty yards parallel to this rugged rampart.

Scattered at irregular intervals over the valley slope appear other isolated and scanty remains of what must once have been the homes of people led thither by some alluring dream. The once well-trodden street has long been effaced by the low-growing western grasses. But all along its course one may still detect the outlines of closely spaced small buildings. At some places nothing remains but the tracing of a foundation over which the buffalo grass is weaving its coarse web. At other places low portions of stone walls remain, though they are weathering and crumbling year by year. Apparently only a layer of mud was originally used in cementing together the rough,

unshaped stones which formed these walls.

Since the original structures have so nearly disappeared, it seems likely that after the village was abandoned, later settlers on the isolated ranches of the surrounding country found these old buildings convenient sources of material for their own foundations, sheds, corrals and the like. No bits of wood or brick or glass now appear. All unseemly fragments from the wreckage of that earlier time have been covered by the mantle of the grass — " the forgiveness of nature."

On an upper level above the protecting ridge of rock, one may trace more distinctly the remains of a larger building, possibly a schoolhouse or a church. Who can tell?

At the eastern end of the street appears the most distinctive feature of the forsaken settlement, an abundant spring of cold soft water gushing from a rocky ledge and flowing away with a soft rippling murmur to join the stream at the farther side of the valley. Perhaps somewhere elderly people are still living who think at times of their childhood playdays, brightened and refreshed by that sparkling water. There may even be more aged people who recall the pain of realizing that their cherished plan had failed, who still remember the sorrow of looking for the last time upon that unfailing spring, which had been to them the source of life in a desolate land.

According to a statement from the Historical

Society of Colorado, these traces of a village are probably all that remain of Carrizo Springs, one of the settlements established during the vigorous westward movement in the late seventies and early eighties of the nineteenth century. Of this particular wave of migration Professor Colin B. Goodykoontz of Colorado College writes as follows:

Land-hungry farmers ventured out on the less desirable lands of western Kansas and Nebraska. By 1886 the overflow from these states was making its influence felt in eastern Colorado. A few years of unusually heavy rainfall in this region seemed to prove the soundness of the theory generally held that as land was brought under cultivation rainfall increased. ¹

With a return of the normal scanty rainfall and consequent failure of crops in the early nineties, these favorable prospects soon faded away, like the mirages of those arid regions. Farms and small settlements were abandoned; entire counties were practically depopulated. Such had doubtless been the fate of our "deserted village."

At one time I was speaking of these ruins to a middle-aged plainsman, who, quite independently of college or university training, has attained to some standing as a local historian and archaeologist. I lamented the sadness of such unsuccessful projects. It still seems impossible not to feel regret for the unfruitful toil, the disappointed dreams, the forced

1. Colorado: Short Studies of the Past and Present. p. 84.

abandonment of plans which had called forth so much of human effort. It was, therefore, rather surprising to note this man's response — almost vehement in its emphasis.

"No," he said; "we should not count their work a failure."

He went on to explain that these earliest settlers had been the pathfinders, the roadmakers. They had prepared the way for others whose later work attained a degree of permanence and material accomplishment impossible for their predecessors.

Considering the transitory nature of man's most substantial-seeming endeavors, —

The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples,

perhaps our friend was right in taking the longer rather than the shorter view. Leadership and the impulse toward occupation and development of some promised land — whether of the soil or the spirit — may be in themselves imperishable contributions toward shaping the dreams of a nation.

Among qualities that might be considered characteristically American, the native, primitive feeling for the earth, the love of the soil for its own potential fruitfulness, has by no means disappeared. Here and there it has survived even the feverish years of the abnormal growth of cities at the expense of rural areas. For the present that movement seems to have reached its high tide and to be pausing or even

beginning to recede. Repeatedly during recent months articles in magazines, stray paragraphs among the news items, editorial comment on current conditions, expressions of feeling in personal letters have given assurance that, far removed as we are from the ancient worship of Cybele, the great Mother of all life, many people do still retain something of the spirit of the far-off days of a primitive faith.

Love of the soil is an emotion hard to capture and confine within the limits of any spoken or written words. Attempts at expression, even by those most conscious of their kinship with the life-giving earth, can be but broken utterances, forever inadequate to the passion of mingled pain and joy, of memory and hope that they would suggest.

It has to do with some inner response to the scent of freshly ploughed ground or of a wood fire at night-fall; the barely perceptible sound of thirsty soil drinking in the welcome moisture of a long-delayed rain; the feeling of cool, damp earth on children's feet; fireflies twinkling over a meadow, like a bit of the starry sky above; mushrooms pushing up through rain-soaked soil and making wide circles which may represent, as old-timers say, the paths trodden long ago by mother buffaloes guarding their babies at night; the sight of fields greening with innumerable spears of springing grain for the nourishment of life; or the same fields mottled with cloud shadows, deepening the

shades of green or silver or gold as the grain bends and rises and bends again before a freshening breeze.

Ages ago, Hesiod wrote of the protecting care of thirty thousand gods upon the fruitful earth. Without attempting to prove or disprove his mathematics, we may sympathize with his feeling that the earth itself gives hints of life and love and illimitable beauty. We may find the vague, inarticulate affections of our hearts voiced by those who seek sincerely to express their own response to the moods of the Earth Mother.

The love of the soil here considered is a feeling quite apart from the desire for economic profits from the possession of land, speculative gains, "unearned increments," and the like. In his recent book, The Farm, Louis Bromfield distinguishes sharply "the love of the land" from what he phrases as "love of the earth." Like Caleb Gare in Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese, with his insane greed for possession, one might have much of the former feeling and little or nothing of the latter.

Mrs. Pearl Buck suggests something of the instinctive affection for the soil in a picture near the close of The Good Earth. Though in his earlier years Wang Lung had added field to field as a means of gain and of material advancement for his family, yet he had treated the land as a precious possession, worthy of eager devotion and sacrificial toil. We see the aged man, with death approaching and the desire for further acquisition quieted, sitting in the sunlight at his cottage door, sifting through his feeble hands the soil he could no longer cultivate. But the touch of it,

warming toward the seed-time, was comforting to him and suggestive of a man's work done, of rest one day upon the fields he had loved and tilled with patient care.

Carl Sandburg in his biography, Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years, hints at the mysterious kinship symbolized long ago in the myth of Antaeus. Remembering the youth of his hero, he writes:

In the short and simple annals of the poor, it seems there are people who breathe with the earth and take into their lungs and blood some of the hard and dark strength of its mystery.

Jim Burden, the fictional bearer of Willa Cather's memories of pioneer days in Nebraska in My Antonia, is another who feels the bond between living dust and the dust to which man at last returns. Sitting in the sunlight of the Nebraska garden, he seems to merge into the warmth and beauty and promise of the scene. Reflecting later in life on the significance of that moment of self-forgetfulness, he says:

Perhaps we feel like that when we die and become a part of something entire, whether it is sun and air or goodness and knowledge. At any rate it is happiness to be dissolved into something complete and great. When it comes to one, it comes as naturally as sleep.

For the purposes of this study it has seemed necessary to fix somewhat arbitrary limits as to the time, the geographical areas and the authors to be considered. Someone else working upon the same subject might, with equally valid reasons, develop a quite different plan.

The first intention was to include — with the exception of works of general reference — no book published before 1914, the year of the opening of the World War. Since that time the world's heart has been burdened, almost overwhelmed, by tragedy and hatred. Poverty, disease, the sorrow of broken homes, the increasing prevalence of crime and suicide, unnecessary suffering of every inhuman sort, have looked all the darker against the garish light of a false, limited, and selfish prosperity.

In view of these conditions it has seemed worth while to examine the literature of the period and try to discover to what extent our civilization may still be said to rest upon the solid earth; to see whether, even yet, there remains some affection for the soil which maintains our physical life, some regard for those whose labor makes the earth fruitful for the service of mankind.

As, however, it seemed desirable to include Miss Cather's story, O Pioneers!, in the discussion, it has been necessary to extend the early limit of the period back to 1913, the year when that book was published. The latest book considered appeared early ⁱⁿ 1934. The time covered is just long enough for children born in 1913 to have reached legal maturity. They will be helping to determine our future course.

To any one considering more than casually the literary work of the last two turbulent decades, a

question quite naturally presents itself. In a period when the basic interests of America were becoming urban rather than rural, when so many people seemed overwrought with the high speed and tension, the excitements and vanities, the spectacular gains and tragic losses of city life, why should there be so large a number of books by serious authors relating to the vanishing frontier, to pioneer conditions, to rural life in general?

There is no categorical answer. One may state only tentative opinions. But two tendencies may have combined to produce such a result. One is the common habit of beginning to attach especial value to those things that are passing beyond our reach. Officially the frontier as an area for general settlement had disappeared by 1890. The Census Report of that year as quoted by Mr. James Truslow Adams made a somewhat formal announcement of the passing of the free lands.

The unsettled area has been so broken into by isolated bodies of settlement that there can hardly be said to be a frontier line. ²

To be sure, scattered and comparatively undesirable areas here and there remained for some time available under the Homestead Act of 1862. Even to-day the latest atlases print maps of numerous counties in Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas and eastern Colorado in white, to indicate populations of less than five to

2. The Epic of America, p. 303.

the square mile. According to Frederic L. Paxson's³ definition of the frontier line as marked by a population of from two to six to the square mile, such counties would still represent frontier conditions, though they are no longer free government land. Nevertheless, at the close of the World War there was no great body of unoccupied desirable land open to the returning soldiers, as there had been after earlier wars. The geographical frontier was a thing of the past.

Possibly the gradual realization that we had practically exhausted a great national resource and had reached the end of an era in our history may have caused a backward-looking tendency in our literature, a desire to evaluate and to represent in permanent form the eager, restless life, the dynamic visions of an earlier time. Such a movement might be compared to the more conscious and formal literary projects of recording Indian music or collecting the old English ballads as they still linger in the minds of many people in the Appalachian region.

In both of these undertakings the purpose has undoubtedly been to gather the elusive material while the older people who cherish these memories can still give their assistance. So one might think of the type of books to be considered here. Though written in our own day, they represent the recollections of people

3. History of the American Frontier, pp. 44-45.

who might say of the incidents recorded what Virgil's Aeneas said of the tragic circumstances of the fall of Troy: "Quorum pars magna fui!"

Recently the Hays Historical Frontier Park has been separated from the campus of the State Teachers' College at Hays, Kansas, and set apart as an independent project. Most of the Middle Western states maintain their own active historical societies and collections of increasing interest and value.

It has become customary for even small towns of western Kansas, Oklahoma, and Nebraska, perhaps of other states, to arrange for Pioneer Day celebrations which are attended by large and enthusiastic crowds. Even though one recognizes the commercial motive, there yet remains at least a living germ of actual interest in the days that are no more. Such community projects could be made a truly educative influence, helping to connect the present with both the past and the future.

A second possible explanation of the large number of recent books relating to rural life is the thought that they may represent one phase of what Professor John Dewey has called The Quest for Certainty. I do not refer to philosophical speculations, although they have their place and importance. I mean rather a widespread desire for a manner of life with more of stability and permanent satisfaction, some better chance for creative effort, perhaps even for meditation, than has been possible amid the deliriums of the present century.

Since the drift has so long been toward the city, it seems natural that, seeking some hopeful change, we should re-examine the possibilities of rural life. Even the deep sadness and apparent hopelessness of The Farm, by Louis Bromfield, is not altogether convincing. It does not discourage one entirely or still his questioning. If farming were to become a respected, reasonably lucrative means of livelihood, might it not also become a wholesome way of life, a refuge for a true individualism, not rugged or ruthless, but patiently and hopefully experimental, proving all things, holding fast the good, but ever seeking the better way?

It must be insisted that these two tentative explanations of the prevalence of books on farming and pioneering are mere suggestions of states of mind for the most part unconscious. It is true that Mr. Bromfield in The Farm avows his intention to record his memories of an earlier day for the sake of his children. But no group of writers ever said formally, "The frontier has passed. We shall celebrate its heroisms. Life has become unbearably complex and insecure. We shall portray a simpler life, closer to the solid earth." We might almost as well suppose that thinkers and writers and artists centuries ago said, "Come; we are weary of arguments and frivolities. Let us have a Renaissance."

The expression Middle West, as used in our title,

is interpreted to include the states of the North Central group, but not the Rocky Mountain states, or those definitely classed as Southern, with the exception of Kentucky. There were two reasons for the decision to include this border state. In the first place, Miss Roberts's sympathetic and delicately written story of The Great Meadow is pervaded with the spirit suggested by our title: a deep affection for the mountains and valleys of her native state. Moreover, old "Kentuck" served multitudes of people as a doorway to the Great West. Migrations from the New England and Middle Atlantic states were often not directly westward along lines of latitude but southwesterly through the valleys of the Appalachian system and into Kentucky by the Wilderness Road. Miss Dorothy Anne Dondore quotes from numerous early accounts of that adventurous⁴ movement into an unmapped region.

Of especial interest because of his later connection with Lincoln in Illinois is a passage from an account by Peter Cartwright of the journey of his parents westward soon after the Revolution.

It was an unbroken Wilderness from Virginia to Kentucky at that early day.... There were no roads for carriages and though the immigrants moved by thousands, they had to move on pack-horses. The fall my father moved there were a great many families who joined together for mutual safety. Besides the two hundred families thus united, there were one hundred young men well armed, who agreed to guard the families

4. The Prairie and the Making of Middle America, pp. 127-132.

through the wilderness. We rarely traveled a day after we struck the Wilderness, but we passed some white⁵ person murdered and scalped by the Indians.

The Cartwright and Lincoln families were but two among thousands from the East or South who made of Kentucky but a temporary home before they continued their westward pilgrimage into the more open prairie lands of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois or Iowa. Since Kentucky thus provided so important a link between the eastern settlements and those of the Central states, it has seemed permissible to include it in this study.

The setting of Miss Ostenso's novel Wild Geese is actually in Manitoba. But her early life and late work are so definitely of our own country, and the natural conditions are so similar to those in portions of our North Central states, that it seemed legitimate to consider this book also within the limits of our subject.

The group of writers touching upon the special phase of Western life is intended to be representative rather than exhaustive. William Allen White and his stories of Kansas; Edna Ferber in So Big and Cimarron; Emerson Hough, Sherwood Anderson, Ruth Suckow and probably other writers might well have contributed interesting material for this discussion, and might have shown a wider range of personal attitude and experience.

However, as in the matter of the time covered, it

5. Autobiography of Peter Cartwright, the Backwoods Preacher, p. 1.

has seemed necessary to make a somewhat arbitrary choice. As finally determined, the list of people and of the more important fields of their interest includes the following names: Hamlin Garland and Herbert Quick, with especial reference to Wisconsin and Iowa and a glimpse into South Dakota; Ole Edvart Rølvaag, whose trilogy beginning with Giants in the Earth tells of early days of South Dakota; Willa Cather, two of whose books reveal pioneer conditions in western Nebraska; Elmer T. Peterson, with memories of Iowa prairies and the "short grass" country of Kansas and eastern Colorado; Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Martha Ostenso, as already explained, picturing widely contrasting scenes, people, and conditions of life in Kentucky and Manitoba.

Of these people, all but two, Mr. Quick and Mr. Rølvaag, are still living. The birth dates of the group cover the period from 1860 to 1900. Directly or by inheritance, they represent several of the more important national cultures which have met and blended in our American life and character. They all give evidence of serious purpose, and the workmanship of all is conscientious. In some cases their books are frankly autobiographical — direct expressions of personality. Their fields of interest and observation cover most of the Middle West. They have all had intimate association with the geographical areas of which they

write.

Life has called these people into varied lines of activity, often far from country living and its never-ending toil. Yet the literary work of each one in a greater or less degree shows vivid memories and appreciation of the bitter sweetness of the earth's discipline. With the possible exception of Miss Ostenso, it is easy to think of each of these authors as a potential pioneer on some frontier of the imagination if not of grasslands or unbroken forests.

CHAPTER II

Biographical Preparation of the Selected Writers for their Portrayal of Rural or Pioneer Life

The oldest writer of this group, and probably the one responsible for the greatest volume of literary work, is Hamlin Garland. He was born at West Salem, Wisconsin, in 1860. Since the publication of Main-Travelled Roads in 1891, his name has been definitely connected with the literature of the Middle West.

Prairie Folks (1893) carried forward his purpose to express "rebellion against the idyllic interpretation of life then current." His conscious purpose was to represent life, not as it ought to be, but as it actually is for multitudes of men and women, a painful, earthbound struggle such as Millet had pictured in "The Man with the Hoe."

While Mr. Garland's fiction shows his interest in the varied life and scenery of the Rocky Mountain states as well as of the Mississippi Valley, his most enduring work will probably be the earlier volumes of the "Middle Border " series. Fashions in fiction change with the passing years. But the sincere portrayal of actual life may survive the vicissitudes of centuries.

For this attempt to relate the history of his family as of one individual wavelet in the great westward-moving tide of migration, Mr. Garland had had ex-

cellent preparation. The primitive surroundings and conditions of his home life during his most impressionable years; his retentive memory and reflective habit of mind; the courageous, steadfast character of his parents and other relatives; his actual participation in the toilsome labors and infrequent pleasures of the pioneer communities in Wisconsin, Iowa, and South Dakota; his success in breaking away from this life so that he could regard it from a distance in a more accurate perspective, — all these factors combined to give Mr. Garland unusual fitness for his self-chosen task.

In reading these books one is sometimes tempted to take refuge in the hope that the people whom he remembers in those days of cruel hardship ~~and~~ not realize their own wretchedness. Possibly cooling breezes brought refreshment when they turned their sweat-dampened faces to the wind to rest a moment from excessive toil; perhaps the warmth of home and family life may have mitigated somewhat the chill of wintry weather. To paraphrase the words of One of older times, the parents may have had meat to eat that even their sons and daughters knew not of. In fact, Mr. Garland himself admits this possibility. But no one can doubt his sincerity or fail to believe that on the whole he has given a true though rather darkly shaded picture of early days on the Middle Border.

A Son of the Middle Border (1917) begins with the author's first definite memory — the return of his father from the Civil War. It follows the family fortunes through their migrations from Wisconsin to Iowa and later to South Dakota. The author tells of the struggles of his early literary career and closes the volume with an account of his almost forcible removal of the parents back to the comparative comfort and security of the old Wisconsin neighborhood. This book prepares for the next in the series by the closing paragraphs in which the mother mentions the only thing lacking for her happiness — a daughter and some grandchildren. Her own daughters had died during the residence in Iowa.

A Daughter of the Middle Border (1921) received the recognition of the Pulitzer prize as the best biography of the year. It had been planned as a second part of the previous record, but the name was changed because of the prominence given in it to Mr. Garland's mother, Isabella McClintock Garland. It records Mr. Garland's marriage to Zulime Taft in 1899 and continues the family history to the death of the father, Richard Garland.

With the next volume, TrailMakers of the Middle Border, the account returns to New England, which had been the home of the Garland family since 1627. It tells of Richard Garland's boyhood in Maine and of the removal of his parents with their children to Wisconsin

by way of the Erie Canal and the Great Lakes. They were seeking a land where, as one of the movers expressed, it, he could "clap a hoe into the ground without striking fire." This book involves more of the imaginative element than any other of the group. It depends more than the preceding volumes on traditions or incidents handed down by older members of the family. Such memories, often stored away subconsciously, required the aid of imagination to form a connected narrative, and Mr. Garland regarded it as the most difficult of the series. This book emphasizes the heavy tasks involved in conquering the wilderness. It suggests the vigor of his parents and grandparents under the most trying circumstances. It records the union of the Garland and McClintock families through the marriage of his father and mother — slightly disguised under other names — and continues the family history to the return of the father from the Civil War, thus ending at the point where A Son of the Middle Border had begun.

Professor Percy Boynton of Chicago University characterizes Back Trailers from the Middle Border (1928) in one word — pathetic. Most people would probably agree with his judgment. The book is honest in its acceptance of the limitations of age. Mr. Garland recognizes frankly but rather apologetically his surrender to the prevalent desire for comfort. Certainly, there is little resemblance between Mr. Garland's account of his eastern travels, of the homes in New York or London, of the entertainment by lords and ladies and lit-

erary lions, of the invitation to eat raspberries within the same garden as a king and queen, and the account the earlier books in the series gave of the westward-yearning visions of his aged father, and of his longing for the irrigated lands of the far West when the Dakota project had failed. Much in the spirit of Ulysses, the father's desire would have been to go forward into "the sunset regions," still venturing.

It is only Mr. Garland's rather wistful recognition of the difference, and his expressed feeling of a sort of spiritual disloyalty to the old days of struggle on the prairie that save the book from being even more "pathetic" than it is.

These four books taken together cover four score years of our national life in a period of amazing national development. To Mr. Garland all students of the growth of America during this period are deeply indebted for so vivid and accurate a picture of life on the frontier.

Mr. Herbert Quick's autobiography, One Man's Life, is a chronicle of a part of the same period. Mr. Quick was born at Steamboat Rock, Hardin County, Iowa, in 1861, and died at Columbia, Missouri, in 1925. Like Mr. Garland, he makes much of ancestry but represents a different national inheritance. As he says, "Some fifteen-sixteenths of me is Dutch." The remaining small fraction is due to an admixture of Celtic-Irish blood, tracing to a soldier of the British colonial forces in New York. This Celtic strain gave to his mother, Margaret Coleman Quick, her black hair and dark blue eyes; also her emotional appreciation of beauty in all

forms and especially of the charm of excellent literary expression. Her unappeased hunger for books and reading carried on into the life of her son Herbert. His recollections of his boyhood on the Iowa prairie with his ~~in~~formal education and early bent toward a literary career, and his earnest tribute to the integrity and unwavering justice of both his parents remain as a most gracious memorial of the middle nineteenth century.

c His ancestors had occupied the successive frontiers of the westward-moving areas of settlement, beginning with what he calls "one of the first frontiers in North America " — the Hudson and Rondout Valleys of New York. Of these predecessors he writes:

They belong to my autobiography because they bore the cells which made up my body and brain, and they were the first trickle of the human stream which for two centuries seeped slowly through the forests like a flood held back by fallen leaves and brushwood and at last burst forth in a freshet on the prairies when I was new.¹

Mr. Quick's early experiences seem representative of those of the more earnest, substantial settlers of Iowa in its formative period. He remembered storms and floods, the mire of barnyards and the beauty of the untouched prairie. He recalled clearly the efforts to build up a new home, " the tragedy of the wheat," the many changes, biological and social, which transformed the raw prairie into a land of farms and homes. Grown

1. One Man's Life, p. 9.

into the substance of his being like the elements which rise from the earth into some fruitful tree through the mysterious chemistry of life, are the effects of the physical and spiritual struggles of those early days. A keen memory for small details, an enthusiasm for people and for life, and a pleasant sense of humor combine to make Mr. Quick an effective recorder of the development of a personality and the growth of a state.

As a child he suffered from infantile paralysis; yet through patient care and native vigor, the effects were so far overcome that in later life he could regard this affliction as a blessing and an actual source of mental stimulation.²

Mr. Quick's mature experiences included several years of school teaching. But he was dissatisfied with the unfinished character of his preparation and used his leisure time in reading law. He was admitted to the bar in 1889 and was elected mayor of Sioux City, Iowa, in 1898. But always his real interest combined two essential elements, farm life and literary work. Both interests entered into his work as editor of the Farm and Fireside from 1909 to 1916.

Of seven novels by Mr. Quick, the most important for our purpose is Vandemark's Folly, first published as a serial in 1921 and 1922. This was the first volume of a trilogy on farm life in Iowa, being followed by The Hawk-eye (1923) and The Invisible Woman (1924).

2. Ibid., p. 47.

Mr. Quick was^a/man of truly broad sympathies and public spirit. His sudden death occurred after an address to journalism students at Columbia, Missouri. He was a convinced believer in Henry George's theories for the abolishing of poverty and in the potential abilities of the common man, if given any fair chance for development and expression.

Though Willa Sibert Cather was born in Virginia and lives now in New York City, her girlhood and much of her work are so closely associated with Nebraska that it is natural to think of her as a Westerner. Her recent historical romances, Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock, have taken her into other fields than those of the childhood experiences. Yet it seems unlikely that any work she is likely ever to do will be more characteristic or more intimately her own than her stories of early days on the prairie, O Pioneers! and My Antonia, which reflect so luminously her childhood environment.

Miss Cather was born near Winchester, Virginia, on December 7, 1876. Her ancestry was English, but the family had been established in Virginia since the time of her great-grandfather. When she was eight years old, the family removed to the ranch of her grandfather in southern Nebraska. Here the little girl grew up with a wholesome degree of liberty. She reveled in the free, out-of-door life. She developed human sympathy and wide interests through her contacts with the homes of various racial groups, Scandinavian, Bo-

hemian, German, French, and Russian.

As there was no school accessible, she studied at home and later attended the high school at Red Cloud, where her family had made their new home. After graduation, she entered the University of Nebraska, completing her course there in 1895.

A deep love for music and a desire to be where it could be enjoyed more freely took her East, where teaching and editorial work prepared the way for her own more creative literary work. Though she has traveled widely in the United States and foreign countries, she has retained her affection for the scenes of her youth and enjoys vacations in Nebraska and Wyoming.

A personal acquaintance, Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, speaks of Miss Cather's "prairie roots" and their influence toward steadfastness and reticence. Miss Sergeant insists that Red Cloud "continues to know and cherish her as its leading citizen".

The history of the state has been written down more literally as well as more lyrically in her pages than it ever will be in more strictly historical works. ³

It is interesting to note that Miss Cather had a close and sympathetic friendship with Sarah Orne Jewett, who in 1908 was already advising her young friend to seek solitude and leisure for individual creative work. In the preface to a volume of selections from Miss Jewett's work edited by Miss Cather, the latter expresses something of her own artistic theory:

3. Fire Under the Andes, p. 264.

The artist spends his life loving things that haunt him, in having his mind teased by them, in trying to get them down on paper exactly as they are to him... He fades away into the land and people of his heart, he dies of love only to be born again.⁴

If this voluntary and loving absorption and resurrection in other lives is evident in the work of Miss Cather, it appears also in the sadly shortened life of Ole Edvart Rølvaag, who was born in the same year as Miss Cather, 1876.

Rølvaag represented a different contribution to the American stock — the Scandinavian. His early home was in a little fishing village on the coast of Norway, far up toward the Arctic Circle. As a child, he was familiar with hardships and poverty, and he early joined in the dangerous work of the fishing fleets. His slight school training of a few weeks each year was stopped entirely when he was fourteen, because he was regarded as too dull to profit by further teaching. But he had formed the habit of reading. The library to which he had access opened to him windows upon a larger world. When an uncle in America sent him a steamboat ticket to the new world of opportunity, he decided to break away from the old life, though this meant the rejection of a tempting offer to become the master and eventual owner of a new and especially attractive fishing boat.

He reached New York in August of 1896 without money or special training or even a knowledge of the

4. Ibid., p. 275.

language of the country. For a time he worked at farming in Dakota. But his mind had now awakened, and he was eager for knowledge. He entered a preparatory school and later St. Olaf College at Northfield, Missesota., where he graduated with distinction in 1905, at the age of twenty-eight. After a year of additional training at the University of Oslo in Norway, he accepted the chair of Norwegian literature at St. Olaf. He retained this position until shortly before his death, when he retired to devote himself more completely to reading and writing.

Though Rølvaag had done some preliminary work in the Norwegian language, including readers and hand-books for class use and some works of fiction, among them Two Fools(1920) and The Ship of Longing (1922), his work was comparatively unknown until the publication late in 1924 of The Land Taking and the following year of Founding the Kingdom. These were written and published in Norwegian, but later translated into English, combined and published as Giants in the Earth in 1928. The trilogy thus begun was completed in later years by Peder Victorious (1929) and Their Father's God (1931). The three taken together give a vivid picture of early days in the Dakotas. They suggest the transfer of interest from the material problems of the initial pioneer conditions to the less definite but equally difficult mental and social problems of a somewhat later period.

Mr. Rølvaag was stimulated to this undertaking

by the report that Johan Bojer, a Norwegian writer, was about to attempt a similar project. He felt very sincerely that only one who had experienced the actual difficulties of the early Norwegian immigrants could present their story adequately and began at once developing his own plans. While his work was under way, he visited Norway and conferred with Mr. Bojer. He was happy to find that there was no real conflict, as Mr. Bojer was approaching the question from the point of view of the homeland and the effect of emigration there. The first part of Giants in the Earth was published one month before Bojer's volume, The Emigrants, appeared. There are points of resemblance, but the circumstances of writing and of publication prevent any suspicion of imitation in either direction.

5

A magazine article by Mr. Rølvaag, "Vikings of the Middle West", suggests even more explicitly than his books his intense admiration for the contribution of his own countrymen to American history. He admits that "pioneer history sounds like tales from the Arabian Nights." Yet these actual deeds of courage and creative imagination have been woven inextricably into the fabric of our national life. One outstanding characteristic of the Norwegian immigrants, their hunger for land, is indicated by his statement that 80% of these new-comers settled in rural areas because of their inborn love of freedom, their fear of anything that might lead to "industrial serfdom". It is Mr.

Rølvaag's thorough understanding of the liberty-loving, active, enduring and essentially religious spirit of his fellow-immigrants that enabled him so successfully to portray them in his most memorable book, Giants in the Earth.

His interest in the Norwegian migration is scarcely greater than that of Mr. Elmer T. Peterson in the westward-moving Swedes, especially the three generations of the Andreen family whose story appears in Mr. Peterson's first novel, Trumpets West (1934).

Mr. Peterson, who is now the editor of Better Homes and Gardens, published in Des Moines, Iowa, was born in Algona, Iowa, in 1884. He graduated from the Algona High School and from Bethany College at Lindsborg, Kansas, where he was honored with the degree of Doctor of Literature in 1928. He has been connected with several Kansas papers, including The Lindsborg Record, The Cimarron Jacksonian, The Wichita Eagle, and The Wichita Beacon. He has occupied his present position since 1927.

To a person familiar with the geographical setting of Trumpets West, it is almost impossible to read it without feeling that much of the material must have an autobiographical interest. It isn't everyone who knows a back-furrow from a dead-furrow or who remembers the "pasque-flowers,— those fuzzy-jacketed lavender blooms with yellow centers which the children called windflowers." These were the Anemone pulsatilla which blossomed in March among the brown dead grass of the Iowa prairie, the flower with its fresh spring-like fra-

grance bursting out of its furry coat before any leaves appeared. As to the question of biographical preparation for his writing, it seems best, with Mr. Peterson's permission, to use his own personal statement.

In my own case, I tried to "eat my cake and have it." That is, I did not want to let the book sound autobiographical, so based the story partially on the life of an elder brother, now deceased, who was a banker and went from Iowa to South Dakota to run a bank. But the psychology of it, and the depiction of scenes, and the motivations come inexorably back for personal concepts plus those related to me by others in similar environments. My method, generally, was first to set down my own personal experiences and psychological processes, and then alter them and adapt them so they would fit my protagonist, Sigurd Andreen. His career did not parallel my own, so this scheme worked out to my own satisfaction. In some instances, where personalities did not enter into the picture, for instance the vignette called "Barnyard Personages," I did follow actual items quite closely. I wanted to make the book as authentic as possible, so cut as closely to the pattern as I could without actually reproducing the personal equation. Sigurd's love affair, however, was 100% imaginary, for my own did not in any way resemble his. The same should be said of many other episodes. Therefore I would not like to have it said that the story was anywhere near autobiographical. I hope this doesn't sound inconsistent.

Miss Elizabeth Madox Roberts is an interpreter of the pioneer life of a much earlier day. In The Great Meadow she pictures the westward movement into Kentucky about 1776. Though one of her later books, it is said to represent an idea present in her mind for fifteen years, the desire to combine the traditions of her own family and present a picture of homebuilding in one portion of the Western wilderness. Her people had begun to cross the mountain passes from Virginia by Boone's Trace as early as 1770 and had

continued their migrations till 1803.

Miss Roberts was born near Springfield, Kentucky, in 1885, and considers the Pigeon River country her permanent home. She was a student at Chicago University from 1912 to 1921. Here she was a friend of Glenway Wescott, who later wrote novels based on Wisconsin life. Miss Robert's first book, The Time of Man, was the October choice of the Book-of-the-Month Club in 1926. It represents the work of several years. In an article of appreciation,⁶ Glenway Wescott speaks of this book as "starvation's pastoral, squalor's Euripidean play."

It is indeed a story of almost unbelievable misery, the tragedy of a nature reaching out vainly for the happier, more wholesome gifts of life and always frustrated by some baffling circumstance quite beyond the individual's power to control.

The characters of The Great Meadow are said to be figures from the memory of Miss Robert's grandmother whose "speech was archaic and fluent and her memory keen, but her tales were never adorned with fancies."⁷ The theme is more striking and the background more romantic than that of The Time of Man, but Diony of The Great Meadow is a less vividly realized character than Ellen Chesser.

The last and youngest member of our group, Martha Ostenso, was born at Bergen, Norway, in 1900.

6. Elizabeth Madox Roberts : A Personal Note.
The Bookman, Vol. 71. No. 1. pp. 12-15.
7. Living Authors, p. 344.

Her unusual name, which means Eastern Sea, is said to be derived from her family history, from an ancestor whose ambition it was to extend his land holdings across Sweden to the edge of the Baltic or Eastern Sea. One might wonder whether this tradition could have supplied the central theme of her first novel, Wild Geese, based on the inordinate passion for the possession of land.

The family came to America in 1902, and Miss Ostenso's childhood was spent in small towns of Minnesota and South Dakota. The family later moved to Manitoba. Miss Ostenso attended the Brandon Collegiate school, the University of Manitoba, and in 1921-'22 was a student at Columbia University. Her first novel, Wild Geese, won a prize in a Pictorial Review contest and has been followed by a succession of other books with the same general setting. Of the small villages of her childhood and their relation to the surrounding areas she writes as follows:

Towns of the field and prairie all, redolent of the soil from which they had sprung and eloquent of that struggle common to the farmer the world over, a struggle but transferred from ... the Old World to the richer loams of the new. ⁸

Of the Manitoba country and its relation to her work she writes :

2 My novel Wild Geese lay there waiting to be put into words. Here was the raw material out of which Little Towns were made. Here was human nature, stark, unattired, in the conven-

tion of a smoother, softer life. A thous- 9
and stories are there still to be written.

In the case of these authors we may therefore conclude that either by actual intimate experience or by close observation, they all had a vivid realization of the scenes and type of characters presented in their books. While the works of these writers indicate freedom of imagination, their material is not uncontrolled or fantastic, but is bounded by the limits of reality.

9. Ibid., p. 314.

CHAPTER III

Love of the Soil as a Motive for Western Settlement

In an essay entitled Earth-Hunger or the Philosophy of Land-Grabbing, Professor William Graham Sumner of Yale University declares that this hunger is unquenchable, "for as we have seen it is the impulse which drives the human race to enter upon and enjoy its patrimony, the earth."¹ Instinctively, without conscious reasoning about the matter, the masses of the people have always realized, as Mr. Sumner explains in this paper, that the condition most favorable to their welfare was "one in which the area of land is large in proportion to the population." Under such conditions ownership of land tended to produce at least a temporary social equality, and in the earlier stages of such settlement one man's chance was as good as another's.

The passion for possession of some portion of the fruitful earth, luring people away from areas of comparative comfort to face the hardships and dangers of the unknown, is recognized as one of the important formative motives in American history.

Mr. Rølvaag in the article already mentioned groups the westward movement with immigration and the romantic spirit into a "trinity of mighty forces," po-

1. Earth-Hunger and Other Essays, p. 63.

tent in shaping to a great extent the history of the United States in the nineteenth century.

Frederic Logan Paxson defines the frontier as an indefinite line that advanced westward from year to year. In advance of it were hunters, trappers, scouts, soldiers, adventurers. Never far behind it were farmers settling down to the arduous task of establishing homes and developing farms in the forests or on the boundless prairie. Again Mr. Paxson says:

Out of this shifting frontier between man and nature have come the problems that have occupied and directed American governments since their beginning as well as the men who have solved them. The portion of the population residing in the frontier has always been insignificant in number. Yet it has well-nigh controlled the nation. ²

Frederick Jackson Turner carries still further the idea of the importance of the frontier. He attributes to it not only national problems and legal and economic changes, but a strong formative influence on American intellect and character.

That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things; lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes from freedom — these are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere by the existence of the frontier. ³

In considering the love of the earth as a motive in westward movements in American life, it is

2. The Last American Frontier, p. 2.

3. The Frontier in American History, p. 37.

necessary to distinguish the spirit of the land-hungry, homebuilding pioneer, capable of feeling some kinship with the earth and responsibility for fair treatment of his newly acquired acres, from the spirit of the speculator who regarded the land merely as a possible source of gain without personal effort on his part. The history of land speculation has recently been related in a very complete manner by A.M. Sakolski. His book covers the story of "Land-Grabbing, Speculations and Booms" from colonial days to the recent wild period of exploitation and disappointment in Florida.⁴

This speculative motive is, however, far removed from the normal desire for a plot of land for actual tillage and the maintenance of a home and family. In One Man's Life, already mentioned, Mr. Quick expresses the distinction very definitely:

There were two types of mind among the pioneer farmers. One looked upon a farm as a means of making money from the rise in values. The other regarded it merely as a piece of soil out of which to produce a living for the family. The former expected to gain riches from the value which the growth of society gives to his land. The latter sought to make his living and that of his family from the fruits of his labor. I regard the former policy as fundamentally though unconsciously, of course, anti-social. The latter is the impulse of the citizen who builds up society.⁵

Again Mr. Quick emphasizes a similar distinction:

They (the Iowa settlers) were farmers who brought with them the desire to make homes and

4. The Great American Land Bubble, passim.

5. Op. Cit., p. 13.

livings therefrom. Some of the covered-wagon people were possessed of the greed of land speculation, but most of them simply desired homes of their own; that and the satisfaction of the racial urge to follow the setting sun. 6

It is interesting to note that this "racial urge to follow the setting sun " is the precise theme of another of our books, Trumpets West, by a later Iowan, Mr. Elmer T. Peterson. Using musical terminology, in a series of brief word-pictures inserted between the larger divisions of his story, he suggests the wild instinctive energy of the westward migrations from the time of the Mongolian movements into Europe and the voyages of the Vikings, to the poetic vision of Walt Whitman,

Facing westward from California's shores.

The quotation from One Man's Life also suggests that the motives of human action are not definitely separable. They cannot be precipitated like chemical elements from a solution. They are more like the colors blending in the rainbow. It is hard to tell where blue ends and green begins! In most cases it would be hard to separate a deep love of the soil as a moving influence from other motives frequently associated with it. Often, as in the case of Per Hansa in Giants in the Earth, or Alexandra Bergson in O Pioneers !, this motive does seem dominant. But other desires and purposes, conscious or unconscious, usually accompany this masterpassion.

Obviously, for young people at least, difficult journeys into unknown lands where dangers of

every sort were to be encountered appealed to some other instinct than the mere desire to possess land and build a new home. In many cases that desire could have been satisfied with a small outlay of energy. But here appears the influence of the "romantic spirit" recognized by Mr. Rølvaag, — the response to the lure of the unknown and mysterious, the Eldorado far beyond the familiar horizon where any cherished dream might come true. Both Mr. Rølvaag and Hamlin Garland quote portions of an old song of the slow-moving wagon trains, a song which must have suggested to weary men and women a place of more fortunate adventures, of almost unacknowledged hopes fulfilled.

When we've wood and prairie land,
Won by our toil,
We'll reign like kings in fairy land,
Lords of the soil!

Then o'er the hills in legions, boys,
Fair freedom's star
Points to the sunset regions, boys,
Ha, ha, ha-ha ! 7

This thirst for adventure combined with the hunger for land is especially noteworthy in stories dealing with migrations from European countries, to many of whose people America seemed a land of golden promise. Of such characters, Mr. Rølvaag's Per Hansa, boyish, zestful, eager for the new and the untried, is again an excellent example.

Closely related to this active desire for adventure in new surroundings was the hope of a fresh

start under conditions more favorable than those of the more familiar environment.

Johan Bojer's story of The Emigrants, the companionpiece to Rolvaag's Giants in the Earth, emphasizes this motive. The hero, Per Föll, in his field of ripening wheat, pressing a handful of the golden heads against his face, like one caressing his best-beloved, remembers " the time when he used to carry earth on his back up the hills behind Skaret" in a pitiful attempt to prepare a bit of soil for a tiny garden.

The same desire appears in real life in the frequent movements of the Garland family in search of an elusive prosperity. Mr. Garland says that the song already referred to was

..the marching song of my grandfather's generation and undoubtedly profoundly influenced my father and my uncles in all that they did... It voiced as no other song did, the pioneer impulse throbbing deep in my father's blood,... and its splendid faith carried him through many a dark vale of discontent. 8

The Shimerda family in Miss Cather's My Antonia provides another example of the land-seeking instinct combined with the desire for a new beginning. That the father, quite unprepared for the difficulties of the strange environment, could not make the necessary adjustment and failed to benefit by the real but disguised opportunities of the new life is one of the painful tragedies of the story.

From our childhood we have all been instructed

regarding the desire for religious liberty as a strong motive in the original settlement of New England. We rarely think of this desire as an important influence toward the later westward movements. It is true that this spiritual craving is so blended with other purposes that much of the time it becomes comparatively obscure. Yet in many cases the religious urge, either to gain freedom for personal worship or to communicate cherished beliefs to others was undoubtedly compelling. In the autobiographical introduction to his collected works, Joaquin Miller says of his own people,

They were devoted Quakers in quest of a newer land where there might be less friction. 9

Carl Sandburg suggests the varied religious connections of the multitudes swarming out upon the prairies in the early nineteenth century:

Many were children of men who had quarreled in the old countries of Europe and fought about the words and ways of worshipping God and obeying his commandments. They were Puritans from England, French Huguenots, German Pietists, Hanoverians, Moravians, Saxons, Austrians, Swiss, Quakers, all carrying their Bibles. Also there were Ulster Presbyterians from North Ireland and Scotch Presbyterians. 10.

The last two groups were especially the victims of religious and economic oppression in their native lands. Mr. Paxson speaks of the " first high wave " of migration into the Mississippi Valley as including for the most part Germans and Scotch-Irish, crowded out of their home lands by poverty, religion,

9. Poems. Vol. 1, Ch. 1.

10. Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years, p. 35.

and the devastation following the European wars.

E. Douglas Branch, referring to the same period following the war of 1812, mentions two causes for a strong westward movement: first, the poor economic conditions of the New England farmer and his radical discontent; and second,

the narrow religious system of the entrenched church, the close scrutiny over private behavior, exercised by church congregations and neighbor-busybodies. 11

Without attempting to go into detail on this complicated subject, it is only necessary to recall a few of the more important religious enterprises of the period of settlement to become assured that very often the religious motive was strong if not dominant.

National groups frequently settled in religious communities. One such band of German settlers founded the Rapp community, established first in Pennsylvania in 1804 and later moved to Indiana. The Amana societies, also from Germany, which were established in Iowa (1855-1864) and which are still flourishing, are a more permanent and successful example of the combination of religious with secular motives for emigration.

Professor Paxson devotes an entire chapter of his History of the American Frontier to the settlement of Oregon, where religious aspirations again played an important part. After about 1834, Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists were active in starting

missionary work in the Oregon region for the Christianizing of the Indians. The Jesuits under Father de Smet not only attempted to make converts of the Indians, but began in a systematic way to develop the agricultural possibilities of the new land. This early religious activity, the overland journeys of Marcus Whitman, the remarkable fruitfulness of the Columbia River Country, all united to stimulate settlement after the disastrous effects of the panic of 1837 had abated and the election of William Henry Harrison had given to the West a new political prominence. Oregon with its woods and streams and fertile soil was settled earlier than the forbidding areas of the open plains far to the eastward.

The story of the Mormon settlements has been told by many writers. Here again the union of the religious purpose with the land-loving, home-building enterprise is especially close. Professor Paxson refers to their building up of a prosperous state in a desert as an "experiment in state socialism like nothing else that the United States has seen." He feels that for most people abhorrence of the distinctive doctrines of the Mormon Church, especially that of polygamy, has tended to obscure the amazing success of the church as a colonizing and constructive agency.

As a group, the authors whose work we are considering give slight emphasis to formal religion and

practically none to it as an impelling motive for the settlement of new lands. Religious faith of a vital if informal type seems implicit as a basis of experience in the actual struggles and failures and successes of the Quick and Farland families. In Mr. Peterson's and Miss Roberts's work religious faith is apparently a largely unconscious belief in life itself as a gift to be appreciated and used to the utmost " in the world that now is." If there is religion at all in Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese it must be a pagan religion of stoicism, a religion teaching a sort of dogged endurance of the cruelties of life, combined at last with satisfaction in the bitter retribution for Baleb Gare whose land-lust recognized no limits.

Mr. Rølvaag is much more conscious of the influence of organized religion in the lives of his people. In the magazine article previously mentioned he insists that his Norwegian countrymen, though rude and sometimes drunken and violent, were nevertheless, as a group, animated by a fervent religious faith and reverence for their sacred traditions. He celebrates the zeal of Elling Elsen, a lay preacher in the early days of Illinois, who twice walked from Illinois to New York to arrange for the publication of some small religious books for the use of his people.

In Giants in the Earth, there are numerous allusions to traditional religious teachings and observances

of the Norwegian settlers. Beret, struggling with her superstitious fears born of the loneliness and bareness of the naked prairie, found a measure of comfort in repeating the words of hymns of her distant homeland. The child, Peder Victorious, was christened with as much of the ritual of the Lutheran Church as could be accomplished by simple-minded folk in the solitude of the Dakota prairie. The coming of the itinerant pastor was a wonderful day in the life of the little settlement and brought to Beret's clouded mind some measure of peace and reconciliation. Of earnest, sober-minded Hans Olsa it is said:

He had been present at the service last Sunday, had taken part in the communion; and the longer the service had lasted, the stronger and deeper had grown his felicity. ¹²

The tragic outcome of the book, the sacrifice of Per Hansa to the gods of the winter storms was finally brought about by Beret's over-insistence that a minister must be brought over the snow-bound, storm-driven waste to give comfort to the dying Hans Olsa. And bitter was her atonement.

In the second volume of Mr. Rolvaag's trilogy, the boy Peder Victorious, at first destined to the ministry, drifts far away from the accepted teachings and grieves his mother by his indifference to the old Norwegian language and manner of thought. He becomes a free-thinker and falls in love with a young

12. Giants in the Earth, p. 409.

Irish Catholic girl. This union to which Beret reluctantly consents represents the defeat of all her most deeply cherished convictions and prejudices. In Their Fathers' God, Beret's failure in adjustment is continued in the younger lives. The conflict between a devoted though ignorant child of the Roman church and one to whom the strict Lutheran doctrines had given way to complete rationalism proves irreconcilable. After Beret's death the home is broken up and the story ends in the tragedy of separation. In both these later volumes Mr. Rolvaag's intention to set forth his themes faithfully is quite evident. But as successors to the largeness and splendid virility of Giants in the Earth, the individual problems seem trivial and the books disappointing.

Willa Cather's most effective portrayal of the religious motive occurs in Death Comes for the Archbishop. There is a series of significant incidents in the actual career of Father Lamy, first bishop of the diocese of Santa Fe, and his companion, Father Joseph Machebeuf. They appear in the story respectively as Father Latour and Father Vaillant. The book reproduces in a marvelous manner the distinctive atmosphere of the varied New Mexico scenes of desert and woodlands, sand dunes and green valleys, deep canyons and barren mesas. Throughout one is moved by the author's sympathy with her subject and the fine restraint of her treatment. But the conditions and characters of

this book seem foreign to a degree not true of the material in O Pioneers ! and My Antonia. There, too, we are interested in people from foreign lands. But while the people of New Mexico remain Spanish, the foreigners of Nebraska were becoming Americans. In these two last-mentioned books, while religion has not provided the impulse to settlement, it is represented as giving stability and direction and forward-looking purpose to all effort. Of the desire of the soul for support and consolation in time of trouble, it would be hard to find a more moving expression than the prayer of Jim Burden's grandfather in My Antonia, when the little group of neighbors gathered at the bleak snow-swept crossroads to give back to earth the broken body of Mr. Shimerda.

The dynamic power of personal religious conviction and character ought to be closely connected with a desire for social betterment for " the least of these my brethren." Instances of such social experiments are not lacking in the history of pioneer movements in mid-western America. One of the most familiar examples is that of the Robert Owen colony in Indiana established by the English reformer. In 1825, Owen purchased 30,000 acres of land from the Rapp community and renamed the location New Harmony. His purpose was to build up a community on the basic idea that the invention and permanent use of machinery to displace hand labor required a new social control of

industry to prevent the exploitation and consequent poverty of the workers. His avowed object was to make possible the happiness of all members of the colony through a "spirit of union and cooperation, founded in a spirit of universal charity."¹³

For a time the experiment proved reasonably successful. The colonists were prosperous and contented. Plans for cooperative living were embodied in a constitution providing for representative government. But differences about forms of government and about Owen's unorthodox religious opinions proved irreconcilable and the affairs of the community were closed in 1828 with a personal loss to Owen of £ 40,000 which represented most of his fortune.

A larger and more important example of the combination of land-seeking with a conscious desire for the propagation of definite social ideals is evident in the free-state movement in the settlement of Kansas. A casual examination of the card-catalog in a well-equipped library on the history of Kansas should be an impressive object-lesson to any one in regard to the history of the exciting period following the enactment of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill on May 30, 1854. Summaries of laws relating to the slavery question, government bulletins, reports on the physical features of Kansas, early memoirs illustrating both Northern and Southern attitudes, later and more scientific histories, special monographs on detailed phases of

13. American Communities and Cooperative Colonies, p. 118.

slavery, fiction based upon the bitter struggle for free soil, accounts of the purpose and accomplishments of the Emigrant Aid Society, — these are but miscellaneous examples of types of material relating to those stirring times. And the inescapable impression is one of violence.

Only by persistent and courageous effort were the territories of Kansas and Nebraska held for freedom, though the more bloody struggle centered in Kansas because of its closer proximity to the slave-holding areas of Missouri and Arkansas. An interesting contemporary account is found in a volume first published in Boston in 1856. This is Kansas: Its Interior and Exterior Life, by Mrs. Sara T.D. Robinson. Though the principal intention of the book was to record the details of the anti-slavery struggle, yet there are many passages revealing the young author's delight in the beauty of the wooded hills around Lawrence, in the blooming of the early spring flowers and her interest in the staking of claims and the building of new homes, and in the church services in a hall built hastily of unseasoned cottonwood lumber, warped and shrinking at every joint. Explicitly she states the animating motive of most of the people in that small serious-minded company.

Most of us have come to this far-away land with a mission in our hearts, a mission to the dark-browed race, and hoping there to stay the

surging tide of slavery, to place that barrier which utters in unmistakable language, 'Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther.' This unlocks our hearts to each other and at once we recognize a friend actuated by like sympathies and hopes. 14

Another picture suggests the eagerness with which people from the East and North responded to the twofold appeal, the opportunity to secure homes in a naturally favored location and at the same time to defend the idea of liberty. Mrs. Robinson writes as follows:

The roads for many days have been full of wagons, white and covered emigrant wagons. We cannot look out of the windows without seeing a number, either upon the road through the prairie east of us,... or going on the hill west on their way to Topeka or other settlements above. 15

Only one of our works of fiction, Vandemark's Folly, alludes to the free soil struggle in Kansas. But it is worth noting in these days of social change that from their early experiences and later observation of unjust economic conditions, both Mr. Quick and Mr. Garland became enemies of poverty, and convinced supporters of the theories of Henry George looking toward fairer opportunities for the masses of our people.

In conclusion, we might say that the love of the soil in the hearts of the settlers of the great West was one element of an eager, vitalizing love of

14. Kansas: Its Interior and Exterior Life,
p. 48.

15. Ibid., p. 63.

liberty. And this spirit found varied expression in active, persistent efforts for free homes, free labor, free religion and freedom of economic opportunities. May this Western spirit live long and at last prevail!

CHAPTER IV

Characteristic Features in a Composite Portrait of a True Lover of the Soil

Of the qualities essential to those who would cooperate creatively with the earth itself in productive effort for the welfare of mankind, perhaps the most obvious is that of youth. We would not deny to mature men and women or even to aged people an affection for the earth, a quickening of the heart with each new spring, a joy in the green growth of summer and the ingathered harvest. The reflective love of maturity may be as real and as deep as the more eager and impulsive ~~emotions~~ of youth. Nevertheless all reading and experience tend to verify our instinctive thought of the land-loving pioneer as one who still retains the vigor and imagination of youth.

When Mr. Marland, elected governor of Oklahoma in 1934, arranged for the contest to select a model for his gift monument to the Pioneer Woman, twelve designs were submitted. Eleven of the sculptors quite naturally presented figures unmistakably youthful. One, Mr. Jo Davidson, contributed to the collection a bent figure of an old woman, lacking any physical grace, with eyes strained and tired as if with much looking across fields shimmering under glaring sunlight or down some dusty road, watching for the coming of husband or child. One may sympathize with the artist's desire to honor those who bear in their own bodies the marks of wearing effort. But he must admit that this figure, though appealing to the imagination, lacked beauty

as commonly interpreted, principally because it portrayed weary and perhaps frustrated old age, instead of the radiant vigor and charm of youth.

It is therefore not surprising to find the principal characters in the books here considered either young in actual years or retaining the attitudes and habits of youth in mature life.

Mr. Garland's " Middle Border " books, it is true, tell the story of himself and his parents from youth to age. But as life goes on and the new generations appear to take up the work passed on to them, the books seem alive with the ambitions and struggles of the youthful. For the aged there are memories brightened by the sunset haze, " the light that never was on sea or land." but present in the poetic fancies of those who look far back to a happy childhood and youth.

The same quality of youthfulness pervades One Man's Life , though on the whole Mr. Quick's memories, probably because of a natural difference in temperament, seem happier than Mr. Garland's. His Vandemark's Folly is based on the innocent mistake of a young boy, unused to the ways of the world and unprepared to cope with its deceitfulness.

Miss Cather's books, O Pioneers ! and My Antonia , both follow their principal characters into mature life. But the reader's interest seems more likely to be in the youthful struggle than in the mature attainment. Artistically, the conclusion of each book seems

not exactly in keeping with the vital enthusiasm, determination and power to give reality to the possibilities of the future that so dominate the earlier chapters.

Mr. Rølvaag's Per Hansa is an excellent example of the man in years but the boy at heart, eager, alert, resourceful and moodily responsive to the influence of changing conditions. There is deep pathos in his farewell to his little son and playfellow as he sets out on the last adventure, from which even his brave heart shrinks in apprehension.

Trumpets West in fiction, like Mr. Quick's and Mr. Garland's stories of real life, passes lightly from the youth of one generation to that of the next. The closing scene shows the grandson of the young Swedish immigrant who had moved into Iowa with an ox-team setting out on a non-stop flight across the Pacific.

In this group of authors, no one has presented more sympathetically the innocent valor of youth than Miss Roberts in The Great Meadow. The wilderness marriage of Diony Hall and Berk Jarvis, the gathering of their little company on the wedding day for the long horseback journey beyond the mountain wall into Kentucky, the difficulties and dangers of the untried way, are related with vividness yet with fine restraint. In this case, however, the courage of youth is no greater than the courage of maturity. Diony is brave because of her confidence in her lover and her ignorance of life. Her father, at first refusing his consent to Diony's

departure, beats out his thought on the anvil along with his horseshoe and returns to make known the change in his feeling: "It will never be said of me I ~~h~~ndered Diony." And the mother, dreaming ahead as women must, into the details of her daughter's future life, quite cut off from all communication or contact, accepts the separation without lament as something inevitable. Her expressions of homely wisdom, as if she were thinking aloud, show the drift of her mind and suggest her dreams of the future.

Along with youth goes naturally the ability to live in one's dreams, to find stimulus to effort in one's vision of an alluring future. No one needs this quality of mind more than those who seek to subdue the earth and year by year make it fruitful for human need. Without the vision of a harvest the sower would never go forth, hearing precious seed. Without the dream of homes, of productive soil, of sunlit fields of grain, pioneering in new lands would be but a dreary task. Repeatedly we find expressions of this forward-looking attitude as a source of energy and effort. At the close of their long trail, Diony Jarvis, looking about with a wondering joy in the beauty of the untouched land asks her husband, "What do we want here? What did we come for?"

His answer is ready: " We want a fine high house out in the rich cane, We want a farm to tend, ...fields.."
 in the

In O Pioneers! Miss Cather says truly:

A pioneer should have imagination, should be able to enjoy the idea of things more than the things themselves.

Because Alexandra Bergson had this gift in full measure, she was able to achieve success. As she reflected upon her life one frosty night under a sky brilliant with late autumn stars, it is said of her:

She had never known before how much the country meant to her. The chirping of the insects down in the long grass had been like the sweetest music. She had felt as if her heart were hiding down there, somewhere, with the quail and the plover and all the little wild things that crooned or buzzed in the sun. Under the long shaggy ridges, she felt the future stirring. ¹

Yet dreams alone are not enough. The lover of the soil must also have an intensity of purpose, vigor in action, and a certain zest in accomplishment if his dreams are to become a reality. This is especially true of those who have been pioneers in the unfriendly region of the high prairie lands. Mr. E. Douglas Branch in Westward speaks of the unusual difficulties attending settlement in this area:

The pioneer technique has not yet mastered the Great Plains; that mastery has never been completed and has been attained in its present degree after infinite disappointment and endless struggle. ²

Of such intensity of purpose and eager satisfaction in accomplishment, we might find numerous examples. But perhaps none could excel in this respect the complete absorption in their chosen tasks that characterized the native American, Berk Jarvis, and the Norwegian American, Per Hansa. Each is swept

1. Pioneers !, p. 71.

2. Westward, p. 583.

along by the force of his own imaginations. Berk Jarvis is the careful planner and the unwearying worker. Whether he sets off resolutely into the wilderness to make salt for the settlement at the time when his first child should be born, or spends his strength unstintingly in hewing logs for the new house on Deer Creek, or in carrying stones up from the creek-bed to lay the outside chimney, his decision and industry never fail.

His wish to have a better chimney than any other man, a taller roof, and a finer sweep to the dimensions of his hall, a hearthstone of one great slab of rock, this filled her (Diony) with a swift flow of pride.

A similar inflexibility of purpose appears in his determination to avenge the death of his mother. As prisoner in the famine-stricken camp of the Ojibways, his strong will and keen wit gain for him the mastery over the situation and eventually his freedom and a chance to make the long, slow, wilderness journey back to his home and family.

In June of 1929 a conference of historians was held at the University of Colorado. One paper by Percy H. Boynton of the University of Chicago relates to the work of Rølvaag whom he considers especially well fitted through personal experience to depict the life of the immigrant, its dangers, struggles, successes and failures. He speaks of Per Hansa as "the incarnation of primitive strength." Like Berk Jarvis, Per Hansa must have a larger house than the

other settlers; he will have the dark walls brightened by the coat of whitewash which no one else had thought of; it is Per who brings little trees from the distant river, who makes the first sowing of wheat in the newly broken ground.

He builds the largest, plows longest, laughs loudest, rages most wildly, forgives most quickly. He is preeminent in all performances. 4

He translates the impulses of his dreams for the future into persistent constructive action in the present. It is fitting that when his body is found in the spring-time he should still be looking toward the west.

~~That~~ this singleness of purpose and complete absorption in some project can be degraded to ignoble ends is shown beyond question in the most tragic book of this group, Wild Geese, by Martha Ostenso. In Caleb Gare every humane impulse is sacrificed to his passionate desire to "add field to field" for his own selfish satisfaction. The normal love of the soil as the source of life and the means of life's continuance has degenerated in him into the lust of possession which eventually destroys him, as immoderate desire of any sort is very likely to do.

Along with the ideal land-lover's spirit of youth and his power to live in the future, along with his intensity of purpose and eagerness in effort, must go a certain resiliency or buoyancy, the ability to rise again after each new discouragement. In fiction

it appears in My Antonia and the heroine's rebuilding of her broken life as a sort of irrepressible urge toward the flowering and fruitfulness of the individual soul. In real life it occurs on multitudes of farms with every seedtime, when temporarily, at least, the disappointments of the past are forgotten and the fields are again prepared for the sowing.

Among our authors it seems to be especially characteristic of Mr. Quick, who had to overcome not only the usual obstacles of a pioneer environment, but the handicap of a constitution weakened and limbs permanently misshapen as the result of infantile paralysis when he was a small child.

And it is Mr. Quick who expresses for us most clearly another requisite of the pioneer character, a quality which tends to unify and give driving force to all the other traits, — that is, a sense of vocation, and of responsibility to the land and its future development.

Iowa lived in the future in those days. It was a land of poverty and privation and small things but a land of dreams. We shivered in the winter storms, and dreamed; we plowed and sowed and garnered in; but the great things, the happy things, were our dreams and visions. We felt that ~~it~~ we were plowing the field of destiny and sowing for the harvest of history but we scarcely thought it. The power that went out of us as we scored that wonderful prairie sod and built those puny towns was the same power that nerved the heart of those who planted Massachusetts and Rhode Island and Virginia, the power that has thrilled the world whenever the white man has gone forth to put a realm under his feet. 5

CHAPTER V

Obstacles in the Course of Lovers of the Soil

Ay me! for aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth.
Midsummer-Night's Dream. Act. 1, Sc. 1.

Of no lover in pursuit of an ideal has this expression been more true than of the pioneer lover setting forth hopefully to capture for himself some portion of the earth's fair domain. Since the hard-won things are the most precious, the very difficulty of attainment may have endeared to many the homes they had gained at such a heavy cost.

Mr. Quick, in Vandemark's Folly, shows an appreciation of the bond that may exist between a man and the acres he calls his own.

Prior to this time I had been courting the country; now I was to be united with it in that holy wedlock which binds the farmer to the soil he tills. Out of this black loam was to come my own flesh and blood, and the bodies, and, I believe, in some measure, the souls of my children. Some dim conception of this made me draw in a deep, deep breath of the fresh prairie air. ¹

So conscious of a sense of relationship is usually an afterthought. The land-loving home-builder during his days and years of active conquest necessarily has his mind directed toward more concrete endeavors, less idealistic conceptions. Yet subconsciously this sense of obligation and hope of future reward has undoubtedly had an influence upon the more serious and reflective.

1. Vandemark's Folly, p. 210.

The difficulties in the settling of the new Western lands are scarcely to be overestimated. In a life of Timothy Flint, a missionary pastor who went from Massachusetts to the Mississippi Valley about 1815, the author speaks of an often disregarded fact concerning the western movement, that is, " the enormous cost in human suffering and life." ² Such ~~sg~~glamor of romance has been thrown about the period of the western migrations and the enduring results are so striking that it is easy to pass over as unimportant the failures and inevitable sacrifices. The difficulties involved were both material and psychological or spiritual.

In the first place, nearly all the settlers were poor with a poverty hard to realize in these days of such widely different social standards. They had little or no money. Their wealth lay in their very primitive household and farming equipment and in their bodily strength and the will to use it. It is interesting to note the comment of President Timothy Dwight of Yale in the early nineteenth century:

Emigration was a safety valve for the standing order, ridding the state of discontented people within whom was a consuming fire which made of them potential revolutionaries. ³

This tends to corroborate the idea that our present economic troubles can be traced in part to the fact that there is no longer a body of free land

2. Timothy Flint, pp. 104-105.

3. Westward, p. 282.

to provide homes for those unable to maintain themselves successfully in older sections of the country.

That lack of worldly goods was the common lot of the western immigrants is taken for granted by the authors of our group. Every one of them portrays the struggles of poverty. Whether they write of European settlers lured to America, as Mr. Peterson says, by their "feverish hunger for land, for cattle, for homes, for timber, " and appearing on the western prairies almost barehanded; or whether they write of young Americans, leaving the older seaboard settlements and crossing the mountain barriers with their axes and rifles, perhaps a cow, and a pack-pony with a few simple utensils and fabrics from their hand-looms; or whether, like Joaquin Miller and Hamlin Garland and Herbert Quick, they write of the toilsome exertions of their own people, always there must be effort to overcome the limitations of poverty.

Could the scarcity of all needful things and the contrast with our own times be suggested better than in the words of calm, efficient Polly Hall, mother of Diony, in The Great Meadow?

"Here's some seed to plant I saved to make you sallet in your patch. You could pink out some good-sized gourd seeds to take, to plant when you get there. Gourds are about the usefulest kind that grows next after bread. You can do about almost anything in a gourd."

This poverty found one natural consequence in the method of transportation to the land of dreams. The covered wagon or prairie schooner drawn by horses

or oxen has become a symbol in art and literature. It appears on the state seal of Kansas. It is the center of interest in a large mural painting by Edwin H. Blashfield at the head of the main staircase in the Iowa State Capitol. It carried the Quick and Garland families to the Iowa prairies; the family of Joaquin Miller from Indiana to Oregon. It appears as the mode of transportation in Giants in the Earth, Trumpets West and Vandemark's Folly. Emerson Hough chose it as the theme of a stirring story of the Oregon Trail, and The Covered Wagon was popular as a story and as a moving picture. To one sympathetic with pioneer traditions the high point in the film version of Edna Ferber's Cimarron comes with the picture of the solitary covered wagon, moving across a rough untracked sage-brush slope toward some promised land of more generous opportunity.

Even when canal boats or river packets or the railroad served for a part of the western journey, the covered wagon was frequently used to complete the long trail.

In many places in Kansas, Oklahoma and New Mexico, the deeply rutted wagon tracks of the old Santa Fe trail may still be seen angling across the sunburnt prairies. By an effort of the imagination, one may obliterate for a moment the impressions of railroads and graded highways and shiny cars speeding back and forth over hills and valleys or perhaps the memory of a silver-winged airplane against the brilliant blue of our western sky. In a waking dream he may see a wagon-

train toiling over the long miles, feel the heat and thirst of the unshaded plain, hear the creaking of wheels or of harness, the rattling of chains and voices of teamsters urging on their tired horses or oxen; smell the sweat and dust of the slowly advancing cavalcade. Such was the means of settlement of a great part of the central and western sections of our country.

A still slower and more laborious method of transportation is the subject of a paper by LeRoy R. Hafen, "Hand Cart Migration Across the Plains".⁴ This was the system of hand-cart trains organized on a considerable scale as a method of reaching the Mormon settlements in Utah. This scheme for the movement of the poorer proselytes to the settlements around Salt Lake continued for several years following 1847, with a fair degree of success. There were an almost military type of organization, and definite assignments of loads and distribution of duties among men and women. A song of the caravans expressed the idea of cooperation.

"Some must push and some must pull
As we go marching up the hill,
As merrily on the way we go
Until we reach the valley, oh."

This method of migration came to a rather abrupt end, however, after the disastrous expeditions of 1856. As a result of poor management in providing carts and a too late start across the plains, one party was overwhelmed in the mountains by storms and starvation. Of a party of 420, sixty-seven perished. In another company, the

4. The Trans-Mississippi West, pp. 103-121.

deaths numbered between one hundred and thirty-five and one hundred and fifty. Regarding this terrible sacrifice, Mr. Hafen, in the article already mentioned, makes the following statement:

Though but little known, the fate of the late hand cart emigrants of 1856 is one of the saddest and most appalling tragedies in the history of the West. ⁵

Most of the writers of this group deal with a period too late for the Indians to appear as an actual menace. Yet the traditional fears remained as a gloomy heritage from the days described by Simms and Cooper. In Giants in the Earth, the wandering band of Indians proves to be in need of Per Hansa's resourceful services, rather than intent upon mischief. Still the dread of these straggling tribes was a source of apprehension until a comparatively late time. Mr. Rølvaag refers as follows to this menace:

" There was the Red Son of the Great Prairie who hated the Palefaces with a hot hatred; stealthily he swooped down upon them; tore up and laid waste the little settlements. Great was the terror he spread; bloody the saga concerning him."

Miss Roberts, writing of an earlier period, suggests the constant, shuddering fear of Indian attack which people of our own time can scarcely imagine. In The Great Meadow the self-sacrifice of Elvira Jarvis for Diony and her son's unappeasable thirst for vengeance upon her Indian slayers, his long imprisonment along the Ojibways and final return to find Diony married to his friend, constitute the main action of the story.

No fair-minded person can read the history of western settlement without realizing that our own treatment of the Indians has been one of the darkest stains upon our record. One's instinctive sympathy is with Polly Hall in The Great Meadow. Sitting straight and unyielding by her own fireside as the travelers tell of the Kentucky country, she says positively:

"Hit's Indian property. The white man has got ~~no~~ rights there. Hit's owned already, Kentuck is. Go, and you'll be killed and skulped by savages. Your skulp to hang up in a dirty Indian house ~~of~~ hang on his belt. Hit's already owned. White ~~men~~ are outside their rights when they go there. "

Yet Thomas Hall expresses as positively the opposite and eventually prevailing theory:

" If the Indian is not man enough to hold it, let him give it over then. It's a land that calls for brave men, a brave race. It's only a strong man can hold a good country. Let the brave have and hold there."

The conversation closes with the reiterated thought:

" Strong men will go ~~in~~ and take."
" Strong men will win there." 6

Professor Paxson, in The Last American Frontier, feels that the occupation and possession of the western lands by the white people was inevitable. Yet he thinks that a wiser and more humane policy might have avoided much of the bloody strife and the cruel injustice of ~~our~~ Indian policy. He especially criticizes the unfair methods of treaty-making with Indian tribes. It was erroneously assumed that ~~for~~ this purpose they were on an equal cultural and political level with their

white associates and as well prepared to resist any infractions of agreements. As a matter of fact, actual settlers paid slight attention to the legal authority for their occupation. If the land suited them, this of itself seemed sufficient justification for locating in a given area, and they trusted to future opinion and action to confirm their titles.

Less terrifying than the occasional attacks of Indians, but scarcely less hostile in effect were the severe climatic conditions frequently encountered by western settlers, especially in the more unsheltered and arid sections of the plains country. The irregularity of rainfall and the prevalence of long periods of drought consuming all the scanty gains from favorable years have often created conditions in which only the strongest or least sensitive could survive. In the characters of O Pioneers! Willa Cather delineates the two types, those who surrender and those who persevere. While the brothers are all but overwhelmed by the unfruitful toil of three years of drought and failure, Alexandra still feels faith in the future.

"For the first time, perhaps, since that land emerged from the waters of geologic ages, a human face was set toward it with love and yearning. It seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious... Then the Genius of the Divide, the great free spirit which breathes across it, must have bent lower than it ever bent to a human will before. The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman."

Quite as difficult to endure as the discouragement of drought is the despair when a promising crop nearly ready for the harvest is cut to the ground by the

merciless sharp sickles of the hail or is submerged and swept away by a sudden flood, the result of some torrential rain. Though too recent a development to be considered in any of these books, the dust storms of recent years have become a new scourge to those who would redeem the high plains country for the service of mankind.

The severity of winter storms, — the blizzards of the prairie regions, — has been a frequent topic among fiction writers, and the violence of such storms can scarcely be exaggerated. In My Antonia the pitiless wind and drifting snow added their gloom to the sad story of the death and burial of poor Mr. Shmarda. Mr. Rølvaag's hero, the conqueror of so many difficulties, must yield at last to the overwhelming fury of the giants of the storm. For sheer pity and terror, no description of these horrors of the winter exceeds that of the storm in Trumpets West. Amid the paralyzing cold and the wild roar of the tempest a baby girl is born and the mother dies while the father strives vainly to reach the solitary cabin with the life-nourishing fuel which he had gone far to procure. Nor can we dismiss such incidents from our minds as merely the result of the writers' imagination. They were a part of the actual price paid by men and women and children for the pushing forward of that wavering frontier line.

As unpredictable and remorseless as the varying moods of the climate were the ravages of grasshoppers

in the early days of the Great West. Mr. Rølvaag's description in Giants in the Earth is probably not based upon his own observation. He came to America too late to have witnessed such a scene. But his account of the plague of locusts from 1873 to 1878 corresponds with personal recollections of older pioneers.

The devastation it wrought was terrible; it made beggars of some and ~~drove~~ others insane; still others it sent wandering back to the forest lands, though they found conditions little better there, either.... But the greater number simply hung on where they were. They stayed because poverty, that most supreme of masters, had deprived them of the liberty to rise up and go away. And where could they have gone? In the name of Heaven, whither would they have fled? 7

Plagues of crickets are mentioned by F.L. Paxson as among the special difficulties in the Mormon occupation of Utah. When one considers all the circumstances, it is not so strange that untaught, superstitious people should regard such pests as an expression of enmity from Satan himself.

Since the publication of The Prairie by Cooper in 1827, the prairie fire has been a frequent element in Western fiction. Cooper's description is lurid and spectacular. Mr. Quick's, in Vandemark's Folly, has an added vividness, because it seems certain that he must have witnessed something of the sort in his own Iowa boyhood and have known personally of such fatal results as he alludes to it. The common means of protecting homes by fire-guards, the rescue of poor Rowena, the hasty back-firing to produce a small island of safety, the heat and brilliance and terrifying roar of the flames as

the fire sweeps on through the heavy dried grass are all suggested with vividness and feeling.

After the fire has swept around and past their small area of safety, Jacob has time for observation and reflection.

Sometimes a whole mile or so of the line disappeared as the fire burned down into lower ground: and then with a swirl of flame and smoke, the smoke luminous in the glare, it moved magnificently up and into sight, rolling like a breaker of fire, bursting on a reef of land, buried the hillside in flame, and then whirled on over the top, its streamers flapping against the horizon, snapping off shreds of flame into the air as triumphantly as a human army taking an enemy fort. Never again, never again!

The more important crises of life seem to carry in themselves some arousing stimulus to endurance or resistance. Failure or surrender often results from the accumulation or persistent continuance of smaller irritations. The effects of drought and blizzards, grasshoppers and prairie fires seem more startling and dramatic than the consequences of smaller sources of annoyance. Yet these apparently less significant details caused much of the physical discomfort of pioneer life, and continue to make rural life a daily struggle for many fundamental comforts, — water, fuel, light, means of cleanliness or communication, which most city dwellers have learned to take for granted.

It was out of an indignant perception of the false glamor thrown about country life that Hamlin Garland did his most significant work. One editor thus expresses his purpose:

Brought up under the harsh conditions of prairie life but freed from them, (he) set out deliberately to reveal the hardships and limitations of life in the West. ⁸

This comment has special reference to Main-Traveller

Roads (1891) and Prairie Folks (1893), but the same determination reappears in the "Middle Border" books. The mood is well suggested by Mr. Garland's dedication to Main-Travelled Roads.

To
My Father and Mother
Whose Half-Century Pilgrimage on the
Main-Travelled Road of Life Has Brought
Them Only Toil and Deprivation, This
Book of Stories is Dedicated by a Son to Whom
Every Day Brings a Deepening Sense of His
Parents' Silent Heroism.

The effect of this bitterness of revolt upon an older writer, also a conscientious realist, is suggested by William Dean Howells in his introduction to Main-Travelled Roads:

"The type is not pretty.;.but it is heart-breaking in its rude despair."

Miss Ostenso's work shows a similar grimness in regard to the shadows of rural life. This darker side must be taken into account by any truthful writer. The emphasis or the proportion of light and shade is partly a matter of the objective conditions portrayed and partly a matter of the writer's personal temperament. So in varying proportions we find mention of the smaller but potentially significant hardships to be endured by those who love the soil. Among such miscellaneous irritations we may recall the scarcity of water, shade and shelter in the plains country; the constant struggle for even passable cleanliness; scarcity of building

materials and the consequent crude and crowded type of homes possible for new settlers; flies swarming in unscreened houses; lack of variety and healthful balance in food supplies; absence, in the plains country, of satisfactory fuel and reliance upon anything combustible, from buffalo chips to sagebrush roots; the vile muck of barnyards after drenching rains; the lack of skilled care in times of illness or child-bearing; endless toil, often without appreciable result — these are a few of the less picturesque physical obstacles in the path of those who would tame the wilderness or hold it in subjection.

These material sources of distress were almost invariably associated with equally real though intangible spiritual or psychological troubles. Prominent among these was loneliness, the sense of irrevocable separation from all that had been familiar. Diony's mother, with a woman's prevision of the years to come, expresses this heavy thought of separation as they prepare for the daughter's departure to the western lands:

"But hit mought be years before we'd ever know whe'r you got there or not, and to what place you went. Hit mought be forever." 9

One of Beret's keenest griefs in the solitude of the great prairie was the thought of her own parents in the far Norwegian land, lightly forsaken under the influence of Per Hansa's ardent wooing. Yet later

the thought of the complete separation, the realization that no service of her own could ever lighten the burdens of their later years, weighed heavily upon her troubled mind and seemed to her an unpardonable sin.

Separation from the scenes and associations of youth often meant deprivation of the earlier cultural influences and the loss of social standing attained in a former home. Such a dislocation and failure to harmonize the new life with the older experiences appears in extreme sadness in the case of Mr. Shimerda, the father of Antonia. Amidst the squalor and poverty of the miserable dugout which sheltered his family, he retained memories of an earlier dignity and continued to the last his pitiful attempts at neatness and cleanliness. He showed a pathetic eagerness for the respect of his neighbors. And when the heaping up of misfortunes proved overwhelming to his sensitive nature, the comment of Jim Burden seems justifiable: " I knew it was homesickness that had killed Mr. Shimerda."

No phase of the longing for the old friends and old ways is more poignant than that which appears in the clinging of older people to the language of their youth. Mr. Rølvaag makes clear the painful regrets of parents when they find that their children turn from the old familiar speech to the language of an alien land. In Peder Victorious

the Lutheran pastor's gift of an English Bible to Peder seems to his mother a crime against every sacred tradition. The bond between language and every expression of the emotional life is so intimate that a break in speech relationships — especially a break between parent and child — creates an almost impassible gulf. Yet to this force of the dominant speech and different customs Beret had to yield as inevitably as her husband had to give up to the invincible monsters of the winter storm.

Life in established communities tends to fall into a sort of conventionalized pattern. People are inclined to do pretty much the same sort of thing that their neighbors and friends are doing. But the severe requirements of frontier life, or even of rural life, are forever calling for unforeseen adjustments. This necessity helps to explain why pioneer life is ordinarily harder for women than for men, for the mature or aged than for the youthful. Women having so much at stake in all social changes are usually more conservative than men, less ready for sudden and radical readjustments. Age lacks the flexibility of youth.

No family in fact or fiction could better illustrate the stimulating but wearing effect of unlooked-for changes than the elder Garland family in their many migrations. They moved from Wisconsin to Minnesota; to an Iowa farm; from the farm to a small town; back to the farm; on to Dakota. Plans to

follow " fair freedom's star " still westward to the supposedly greater security of the irrigated regions were frustrated only by the author-son's insistence that it was time to take the back trail to Wisconsin. We sum up in brief phrases an Odyssey of heart-breaking effort and disappointment, a constant attempt to become adjusted to unfamiliar scenes and conditions.

Even when the geographical changes are less numerous, the day-to-day readjustments are constantly demanded. Mr. Percy H. Boynton recognizes this necessity:

"The farmer still prolongs the life of the pioneer — heir to his hardships if not to his hopes." 10

"The farmer's life, moreover, is a continual dealing in futures; from his winter planning and his spring burrowing to the shift from what he plans in the evening to what next morning's wind and weather dictate or permit. His life may be full of drudgery, but it is a life of crisis, too, with excitement in compensation for fatigue, with prospective results always in sight and hope always over the horizon." 11

Much can be endured with fortitude while health of body and mind continue. But when bodily strength breaks under the long strain or the mind weakens and becomes a prey to superstitious fears and fancies, then the price of the "land-taking" becomes too great.

In two short reflective paragraphs Mr. Rölvaag speaks of such inordinate sacrifices:

10. The Rediscovery of the Frontier, p. 23.
11. Ibid., p. 89.

More to be dreaded than this tribulation was the strange spell of sadness which the unbroken solitude cast upon the minds of some. Many took their own lives; asylum after asylum was filled with disordered beings who had once been human. It is hard for the eye to wander from skyline to skyline, year in and year out, without finding a resting-place!...

Then, too there were the years of pestilence, toil and travail, famine and disease. God knows how human beings could endure it all. And many did not — they lay down and died. 12.

It is, therefore, not strange that in books relating to pioneer life, Death should never seem far away. Not often in fiction do we find a scene so filled with piercing misery as the true account of the birth and death and burial of the small daughter of the missionary pastor, Timothy Flint, while the hurricane raged over the sandbar in the Mississippi upon which the family had taken a temporary refuge; though the story of Ruth Ann's birth in the blizzard in Trumpets West approaches it in horror. The Great Meadow is shadowed throughout by the spectre of death in violent and shocking forms. The suicide of Mr. Shimerda is an example of the breaking of a gentle nature under the stress of poverty and despair. Giants in the Earth closes with the death of the life-long friends, Per Hansa and Hans Olsa, the one giving his life in the attempt to bring spiritual comfort to the other. Wild Geese ends with a scene of gruesome horror, the destruction of Caleb Gare, entrapped and entombed in the "muskeg",

as he strives vainly to save from an advancing fire the flax crop which had become to him an object of worship.

A deep pathos lingers about the thought of lonely graves, especially the graves of children, along the route of the old wagon trails. Yet the necessity of facing forward, of moving on, though leaving one's heart behind, was a not uncommon experience for fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, in the days of Western settlement.

Death of the body brings sadness, but it also brings a sense of finality and eventually of peace to those who mourn. But the broken mind is the source of continuing torture to itself and all within its influence. Beret Holm's superstitious terrors began with the evening of their arrival at the shelterless place selected for homesteads by the other members of their party. The exposure and solitude of their location, Beret's dislike of the crude discomfort of the poor little home, her fears of the real dangers confronting the small settlement, her fanciful crowding of the surrounding waste-lands with all sorts of spiritual adversaries, are all portrayed with sympathy and understanding. Unfortunately, in such cases in real life there was not always the partial recovery that came to Beret through the renewing of religious influences.

Truly, the cost of conquest was tremendous.!

It imposes upon the inheritors of past benefits an obligation to met only by handing on to the future the imagination, courage, and strength to occupy new frontiers of the human spirit.

CHAPTER VI

Compensations

In the face of such heartrending tests of ability and endurance, how then did it come to pass that the frontier line did nevertheless continue to advance? There must have been compensations to reconcile people in some measure to the dangers and difficulties of their land-seeking, home-building vocation. We know from testimony that there were many persons of the type Mr. Boynton calls "incorrigible pioneers." They suffered the physical discomforts and the mental tortures that the less resolute often found overpowering. Yet they did not surrender. By some strange alchemy of the soul, they derived strength and sweetness from the harsh and crude and bitter circumstances of their daily lives. In later years, they could sometimes look back and see that the long years of aspiration and effort, the too frequent failures and the partial successes had in some way worked together for good.

I recall an incident of this sort from my own girlhood on an Iowa farm where conditions were none too luxurious. My father came home from town one day deeply moved by a conversation he had held with an older man who had pioneered in Dakota Territory years before. He told my father of the grievous

hardships he and his wife had endured, of the sacrifices they had made in rearing a large family. Yet he ended his story by saying, " I'd be glad to do it all over again." I can still hear the little break in my father's voice as he reported this saying of his aged friend, a true lover of the earth.

Of kindred feeling was Jacob T. Vandemark, though we suspect that he speaks for his creator, Herbert Quick.

We went through some hardships, we suffered some ills to be pioneers in Iowa, but I would rather have my grandsons see what I saw and feel what I felt in the conquest of these prairies than to get up by their radiators, step into their baths, whisk themselves away in their cars and go to universities. I am glad I had my share in these old sweet, grand, beautiful things, the things which never can be again. ¹

One could not analyze precisely the elusive compensations that cheered the true worshipers of the earth-spirit. Not all would find stimulus or relief in the same reflection or experience. But apparently many found one source of enthusiasm in their sense of nearness to the beginnings of an ordered life in places where, before their coming, all had been uncultivated, unsubdued. To such settlers the sight of productive soil, whose possibilities were all to be developed by their own efforts, may well have given something of the exhilaration of the artist when he visions creatively the images

1. Vandemark's Folly, p. 362.

he would fashion by his own skill.

Over and over the motive of the first breaking of the prairie sod is used by our writers. Such plowing is never represented as the toilsome task that it might be in older communities. Always there is the lift, the eager thrill of adventure. Mr. Peterson in his chapter "Barnyard Personages," which he assures us comes near to actual experience, writes beautifully of this great event in a pioneer's experience and of the emotional effect on the child Sigurd:

But up from the sod there arose a sweet and potent new odor. It was the odor of the virgin soil, which has tempted men during an eternity of past. It was a brew from wild soil that appears only once — when the plow first breaks the sappy grass-roots... The compelling odor of the soil had a strange power over Sigurd. It set him to craving for strength and action. Emotions struggled within him — he did not know what. He was exuberantly alert and wishful as he dug his hand into the cool, moist clods that crumbled and gave forth their pervasive intimation of fertility. 2

For land-hungry immigrants from countries where land-owning had for generations been the privilege of the few, the sense of possession was keenly invigorating. Johan Bojer puts the idea plainly in writing of his hero, Per Föll.

Things were different now; his time was his own; the ground was his own; he was a land-owner; it was a new life altogether. 3

And again he writes:

2. Trumpets West, p. 35.

3. The Emigrants, p. 91.

At last he could turn and look back along his first furrow. Well, that was the first. And something like earth, too! Rich, dark soil. He took up a handful and smelled it, and his face softened; somehow it reminded him of the smell of cream porridge... This was earth and no mistake. ⁴

In their pictures of real life, Hamlin Garland and Herbert Quick both emphasize the same delight in possession, the same anticipation of material and spiritual blessing from the conquest of the newly-broken prairie. Mr. Quick says of the new home in Iowa,

It was a building which many farmers nowadays would not think good enough for a henhouse, but it was ours. There was magic in this word. A block of this black turned-up sod half a mile long and a quarter wide was ours. ⁵

Observers during the most active migration movements have commented upon the spirit of hopefulness that animated such home-seekers. Having turned their backs upon the cramping conditions of some earlier environment, sharing the racial urge toward some distant Atlantis amid the waving grass of the Western prairies, confident of their own power to overcome all obstacles, these pioneers had the buoyancy of faith in a better day for themselves and their children. Mr. Branch quotes an Eliza Farnham on the amazing spirit of the immigrant trains:

I have met many hundreds of these moving caravans and scarcely ever saw an unhappy or anxious face among them. ⁶

4. Ibid., p. 93.

5. One Man's Life, pp. 104-5.

6. Westward, p. 288.

Even A Son of the Middle Border, written with the conscious purpose of emphasizing the harsher side of pioneer life, shows gleams of this illuminating beacon of hope. With each ~~change~~ of location there was at least a chance that the family fortunes might change for the better. Though the hope often proved illusory, it did not perish. Something of the same spirit of optimism has become a part of our American tradition. It still persists though our pioneering now must be along new lines of social and economic experimentation, keeping us still seeking to give form and permanence to our dreams of opportunity for the common man.

In the opening lines of Endymion, Keats has formulated an enduring estimate of the power of beauty. Perhaps our familiarity with the words has blunted a little our perception of their truth.

A thing of beauty is a joy forever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet
breathing.

Among the compensations for the dangers, the earth-stains, the irksome toil of the wilderness life, none has received more attention in literature than the natural loveliness of the unspoiled earth. In Trumpets West Mr. Peterson has reproduced faithfully the austere beauty of the high plains, less luxuriant and more elusive than the varied charms of the wooded and watered areas to the eastward. He writes:

The high prairie is different from the desert.
It has the same horizontal spread, stretching

from eyes' limit on one side to the eyes' limit on the other. But it holds-out a tantalizing half-promise of productivity in contrast with the frank and brazen sterility of the desert. All low places teem with life. Blue-stem grass and innumerable flowers grow there at the slightest encouragement. There are sunflowers and wild portulaca and gaillardias and loco weeds and scores of other plants that cling to life in the slightest pretext of shelter and moisture. On the long uplands the short curly buffalo grass, which sends runners along the ground, puts out its hardy gray-green mat, and here and there are spap-weeds, sometimes called Spanish dagger, and the smaller crouching cacti, able to go through week upon week of rainless weather without showing a sign of withering. 7

Miss Cather's stories of early days in Nebraska seem vibrant with the fresh breezes rustling through the tall red grass. Not all were responsive to these influences. Doubtless many a Peter Bell passed over the immigrant trails with mind set upon some material goal, oblivious of flowers or waving grasses, of starlit skies, of cloud masses reflecting in magic colors the glory of the sunset. But to many others such beauty offered consolation for the past and strength for the future. Of Alexandra Bergson in O Pioneers! it is written:

There were certain days in her life; outwardly uneventful, which Alexandra remembered as peculiarly happy days; days when she was close to the flat, fallow world about her, and felt, as it were, in her own body, the joyous germination in the soil. 8

Miss Cather's word vignette picturing the solitary wild duck splashing in the pool with the vigor of complete abandon, Rene' Rapin considers "a Wordsworth touch." It represents to her what the daffo-

7. Trumpets West, p. 110.

8. O Pioneers!, pp. 203-204.

dils did to him, " emotion recollected in tranquillity" and seems to verify the thought of Keats as to the refreshing power of remembered beauty.

A different sort of natural charm appears in The Great Meadow, where trees of many sorts grow luxuriantly and birds of every color go flitting about making brief flashes of light in the shadows and a ripple of music on every side. The great cliffs tower in the path of the travelers and add to the picture an element of mystery and fear.

In writing of his own boyhood, Mr. Quick also finds happiness in his recollections. Comparing the abundant crops of corn and wheat and oats with the earlier grasses, he finds beauty in both past and present.

But they [the cultivated crops] have displaced something the beauty of which will never return, and may be called to memory as a rare and beautiful thing in a gallery of pictures in the Land of Nevermore: and not without a touch of sadness in spite of the inevitability of its passing. 9

One feature of the early Iowa landscape whose disappearance Mr. Quick especially regretted was the large number of little clear streams slipping through the sharp slough grass of the "draws" or depressions between the rolling slopes. With the ploughing of the sod, more moisture was absorbed into the soil, the drainage channels were interrupted, and the little rills became only a memory

to those who had loved them.

Yet achievement must always be paid for in some way. The early settlers must have found one important cause of satisfaction in their sense of accomplishment of a worthy purpose. They had dreamed of subduing the earth, and a new field of waving grain meant some measure of fulfilment. The emotional effect of such a triumph and such beauty is suggested by Mr. Quick as he writes of the wheat field:

The waves of shadow as the grain bent to the breeze, straightened and then bent again, used to bring tears to my eyes — tears of sheer delight — it was so marvellously lovely.

A more exulting sort of satisfaction appears in Mr. Rølvaag's report of the first wheat harvest in the Spring Creek settlement:

Per Hansa was in a rare mood that afternoon. Now he was binding his own wheat, his hands oily with the sap of the new-cut stems: a fine oil it was too — he rubbed his hands together and felt a sensuous pleasure welling up within him... How good it was to be alive! He had made a daring throw and luck had smiled on him!

Of a somewhat similar spirit is Diony's pleasure in her gourd plants just rising above the soil by the wall of the stockade.

"Last week," she said, " I put my gourd seeds into the ground, and now they're up in a fine way. By and by I'll have me a whole crop of sugar bins and home-made noggins and tankards and pitchers, all a-grown on a fence. If the turkeys or the buzzards set a bill into e'er one of my noggin crop, I'll be plumb bereft. I got a place already for every last dish you'll see a-grown there."

Closely associated with the feeling that under their hands the first commandment to humanity was finding fulfillment was the conviction of many pioneers that they were contributing to some purpose larger than that of their individual lives. Hamlin Garland says specifically of the early settlers in Kentucky that they

felt themselves to be (as in a sense they were) instruments in the hands of the Lord, forerunners of the nation's westward march.

In Trumpets West Mr. Peterson refers to the "massive religious conviction" and the "intense patriotism for nation and state" which characterized the occupation of Iowa.

An important enterprise it was, that is, in the minds of the people.

A sense of definite vocation and of vision for the future is stated definitely in the closing words of Mrs. Robinson's narrative of the free soil struggle in Kansas.

The sad tragedies in Kansas will be avenged when freedom of speech, of the press, and of the person are made sure by the downfall of those now in power, and when the song of the reaper is heard again over the prairies, and, instead of the clashing of arms, we see the gleam of the ploughshare in the peaceful valleys. Men of the North, shall the brave hearts in Kansas struggle in vain? ¹¹

Not all Western settlers, of course, were as thoughtful as Mrs. Robinson, or moved by so definite a moral purpose in settlement as is shown in this passage. Yet in different ways and in varying

10. The Westward March of American Settlement, p. 14.

11. Kansas; Its Exterior and Interior Life, p.

10

degrees, many did undoubtedly find an immense stimulus for effort and a compensation for much adversity in the assurance that their work was in a sense consecrated to the cause of humanity.

CHAPTER VII

Special Recognition of the Contribution of Women to the Conquest of the Frontier.

In his little handbook on The Westward March of American Settlement, Hamlin Garland expresses regret that the part played by women on the frontier had received such slight ~~attention~~. To quote his own words:

Few of the books dealing with these days give even casual praise to the heroic wife and mother of the border. ¹

Much of the most sincere feeling in his own autobiographical writings seems prompted by a desire to atone for this general failure to recognize the special trials and heroisms of pioneer women.

Whether Mr. Garland was mistaken, or whether his plea had a wide and immediate influence, or whether other writers spontaneously reached the same conclusion, it is hard to say. But among the writers of our selection there seems to be, on the whole, a keen understanding of women's troubles and a just appreciation of their services. Many other writers have emphasized the toil and sacrifice of women in rural life or during the period of Western settlement. Among such we may mention Miss Ruth Suckow's stories of Iowa life, especially Country People; Mrs. Bess Streeter Aldrich's widely read story, A Lantern in Her Hand; and Glenway Wescott's study of Wisconsin life in The Grandmothers.

1. The Westward March of American Settlement, p. 18.

Mrs. Honoré Willsie Morrow's We Must March is based upon the diaries of Narcissa Whitman and reveals the important aid she gave in encouraging the early settlement of the Oregon country.

Besides books we have other evidences of a sympathetic interest in women's contributions to the winning of the Middle West. Here and there appear recently sculptured figures of the Pioneer Woman or the Pioneer Mother. Some of these statues have attracted not only local but national interest. In Portland, Oregon, the statue of Sacajawea or Bird Woman, guide to the Lewis and Clark exploring expedition, is a fitting memorial of a different type of service. All these statues express in symbolic form reverence for what has been good in the past, and idealism for the future.

Among pictures of actual life, Mr. Garland's books, A Son of the Middle Border and A Daughter of the Middle Border, are his best tribute to the patience, fidelity and inspiring gentleness and courage of his own mother and through her to all pioneer women. Mr. Quick likewise attempts to pay his debt to his mother in One Man's Life. He recalls her very limited opportunities for school training, her keen emotional response to all that was lovely in life or literature, her flowers and shrubbery about the rude little prairie home, her indignation at every sort of injustice or oppression, her fearlessness in maintaining her convictions. He

seems proud to remember that in her old age men of superior opportunities liked to visit with his mother " just to have a talk with her," and, as he says, " were well rewarded for their pains." ²

Largely through reflection upon her character and experience, Mr. Quick derived his ardent faith in a true democracy which should give to each child a chance to develop to the utmost his own native gifts. He believed

in the possibility of a state of things in the future under which we shall not rest our fate upon an occasional giant, but may depend on having a race of full-grown, symmetrically developed men and women, nurtured in the sunlight of justice and equal opportunity, through the operation of which alone we can determine whether this one or that is fundamentally good and useful, whether he may be great or little. ³

One may feel that Joaquin Miller's poetry and personality are rather theatrical, but his autobiography is unusually interesting, especially those portions relating to his poverty-stricken childhood in Indiana and the wagon trip to Oregon. Like many other people, the family fell under the spell of Captain Frémont's accounts of his explorations and the West became in their fancy a land of radiant visions. Mr. Miller speaks of his father and mother as " brave and silent builders of the State." It is pleasant to remember that a bronze portrait-bust of his mother is now in the library of the University of Oregon.

2. One Man's Life, p. 31.

3. Ibid., p. 33.

The women just mentioned are but three among the multitudes of those whose life and continued influence went into the building of the West. Regarding such personalities Mr. Branch makes a summarizing appraisal in his Westward:

These women were an American product; one's involuntary tribute is they are amazing. ⁴

Of fictional heroines who exemplify the spirit of the new West, none seem finer than Miss Cather's. She has been criticized for sentimentality and for being too tender toward her characters. Artistically, this is perhaps true, especially of O Pioneers! Alexandra Bergson, the young girl left at her father's death with so heavy a weight of responsibility, develops into a strong woman, far-seeing and resourceful in practical affairs, wise and sympathetic in her attitudes toward others. Lasting sorrow enters her life through the tragic death of her favorite brother. Yet we feel that Alexandra could have conquered even this grief in the majestic solitude of her own soul-strength, and we almost resent the reappearance of the shadowy Carl Linstrum to provide the happy ending.

However, real tenderness is not too common. One is inclined to forgive an excess of it in a writer who feels as deeply as Miss Cather does our kinship to the good green earth. At one point her Alexandra says truly:

We come and go but the land is always here.
And the people who love it and understand it are
the people who own it — for a little while.

And nothing could excel the restrained blending of hope and pain ~~in~~ the closing words of O Pioneers!:

Fortunate country that is one day to receive hearts ~~like~~ Alexandra's into its bosom, to give them out again in the yellow wheat, in the rustling corn, in the shining eyes of youth.

Antonia is of quite a different type. Her strength is not that of superior intellect. She is of the earth earthy. She is cruelly misled through her inability to rise above that level. Again the fortunate ending is contrived, perhaps too arbitrarily. But it does not seem so incongruous as the conclusion of O Pioneers!, because it restores to Antonia the chance to express herself in harmony with her natural temperament, her inarticulate love for the earth and its fruitage.

She [Antonia] had only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand on a little crab-tree and look up at the apples to make you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting at last... She was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races. ⁵

In the character of Beret Holm Mr. Rølvaag suggests the relative difficulty of material and spiritual adjustments. Poor Beret is distracted mentally and spiritually by the strangeness and loneliness of the new environment. She is like a tree rudely transplanted which is unable to root vigorously in its new location and lives a withered, half-starved life. On the side of everyday living, after Per Hansa's death in the storm, she develops a notable thrift and ability for wise and careful management of the affairs of the homestead.

But the old doubts and fears and disappointments lurk in the depths of her nature, ready to spring forth at any crisis and to storm even the citadel of reason itself. Doubtless her struggle is symbolic of the conflict in many men and women who found the ruling of their own spirit a daily battle amid the more tangible difficulties of their new surroundings.

Miss Robert's women characters in The Great Meadow show less struggle, more acquiescence in life as it comes. This acceptance of fate seems not unreal in the case of the older woman. Polly Hall's placidity, her practical wisdom and industry, make her an attractive character, an excellent mate for Thomas Hall, dreaming over Virgil's "Arma virumque cano"; or the vague idealism of Berkeley's philosophy. Elvira Jarvis is the true pioneer, sharing her vigor and determination with her many sons and shrinking not from a hideous death that Diony's life may be spared and the family heritage continued. But for some reason Diony is unconvincing. As a girl, dreaming a young girl's dreams, she seems to be of flesh and blood. We should like to have our admiration sustained. But as a woman calmly preparing for her husband's departure when she most needs the support of his near presence, or almost without question accepting a new mate after a year's absence has made Berk's death seem probable, or coldly deciding between her two lovers when the first one returns, Diony is too stolid — or too noble — to seem true. Perhaps we merely resent her triumph over emotion, but we should feel more

impressed with her humanity on the night of Berk's return if she had not so quietly surrendered herself in her solitude " to the extinction of sleep." The special demands upon women's fortitude in the wilderness, their meagre life in the cramped quarters of the stockade at Harrodsburg, the struggles for food and clothing, for cleanliness and all common comforts, the daily anxieties about Indian attacks, accidents, child-bearing, child-care, and the fate of distant friends, these are all realistically portrayed. They help to concentrate our attention upon woman's share in gaining and maintaining the empire of the West.

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusion

In concluding these reflections on the love of the soil as a ruling motive, our thought naturally takes two directions. We think of the life of a by-gone day and the expression of it in our literature. To the men and women who gave the strength of their bodies, the travail of their minds, and the love of their hearts to the winning of the Western lands we offer our tribute of honor and admiration.

They made trails and roads; they located fording places and built bridges; in some places they cleared away the forests; in others they planted trees; they established homes and developed methods of farming to suit unfamiliar conditions; they shaped the course of the advancing frontier line; they were themselves molded by the conditions they were forced to meet. They founded governments exemplifying American principles; they gave to " democracy " a new meaning. Sometimes boldly, sometimes timidly, they took possession of their promised land. Sometimes doggedly without reflection, at other times sacrificially with a deep and abiding love, they pursued their purpose. Of them we may feel that they " rest from their labors; and their works do follow them."

Our gratitude rightfully belongs to them. It belongs to those who, through the recording of tradition,

experience or imagination, have helped us to realize our debt to the past. They do not all write from the same emotional experience or with the same artistic ideals. But "each in his own tongue" helps us to relive the ambitions and efforts, the hope and fear and love and pain of a day that will soon be lost to memory except as it survives in the pages of books.

A little conversation from The Great Meadow may be taken as symbolic of the relations between successive generations or between those who make paths and those who follow them. Diony is talking with Daniel Boone, who has suddenly walked out of the forest toward the fort at Harrodsburg:

"Like all the balance I walked to Kentuck, or rode my nag, over your road," she said, "marched here over the trace you made out for us. I'm obliged to you for a road, right obliged and beholden."

"You're right welcome to it," Boone said, "If I marked out the way, you had to go it with your two feet, and so the road's yours too for the trouble you took to walk it. And the dangers was yours whilst you went the way."

May we who have been shown the trails that our people have traveled, be thankful for the spirit of their venturing, strong to face the dangers that still threaten, and earnestly active to keep the way clear for those who are to follow.

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